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CHALLENGE 47

The Magazine of Science-Fiction Gaming

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About the Cover

Mark Schultz explores the world of the Xenozoic era in this cover to the **Cadillacs & Dinosaurs** graphic novel, published by Kitchen Sink Press. For more information on GDW's new **Cadillacs & Dinosaurs** roleplaying game, see "The Horror Below" on page 42.

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From the Management

Themes for roleplaying games seem to have their "time." For instance, long ago and far away *D&D* was invented. Since then many follow-on fantasy RPGs have come along—all of them trying to improve on *D&D*. They reinvented the wheel in brighter colors, with more "historical accuracy," or in easier to play or more "realistic" (i.e., more complicated) formats. And none of them ever succeeded to the degree of *D&D*.

Why? *D&D* came into existence at the right time for fantasy RPGs. Gamers' minds were seized with a frenzy for magic, elves, castles, and swords—right then. And then fantasy wasn't "new" anymore. (This ignores the fact that *D&D* invented RPGs. I know that. This is an example, not a *perfect* example.)

I've seen various themes/genres come and go out of fashion since then: science-fiction, espionage, post-holocaust, giant robots, superheroes and horror. One game in the genre seems to take the lead (not always the first one), and the others gradually fade into obscurity (not that some aren't still around—they just aren't as prominent).

Lately, I see the front-running themes as being one "pure" genre—cyberpunk—and a tendency to mix genres (*Shadowrun*, *Rifts*, *Space: 1889*). Who will win the lead in the cyberpunk genre is yet to be determined (*Cyberpunk 2020* looks strong), but the multigenre trend is what is most fascinating to me. Suddenly what was a big "no-no" in game design, guaranteed to confuse your audience and result in poor sales, is the hottest thing. What has caused gamers to suddenly like what they hated in a game before?

I'm not sure. Personally, I think the desire to "have it all" has secretly been harbored in the nooks and crannies of every roleplaying gamer's heart. As soon as the roleplaying habit is acquired, every gamer I know of has fantasized about what the "ultimate" game would be and which elements of which already-extant games would ideally be incorporated into it. Maybe the multigenre games are a manifestation of the game designers finally making the big step to put those covert desires down on paper. What do you think?

CHALLENGE

TWILIGHT 2ND EDITION

I remember buying the first copy of *Twilight: 2000* that my local game shop unpacked. I was 16 and a month from signing my first set of enlistment papers, still in high school in backwater Wichita, Kansas. I remember the surprise I felt when I first read through the players' manual: *here* was a game that captured the essence of modern military life. (Finally!) And my respect for the system only grew as I clawed my way through the military machine. Sure, there were flaws—all games have them. I never liked the warped ammunition system, but the total package was still the best I'd found for capturing the U.S. Army experience.

It was after I started classes at T.U. that I found the system's tragic flaw. I met an upperclassman (now a second lieutenant in the Corps of Engineers) who was also an avid *Twilight: 2000* fan. He'd never been able to get a game to last on campus for the very reason that we so enjoyed it: It required too much from our civilian friends to keep up. We already spoke the language, knew the equipment and doctrine and had a firm feel for the game environment—which meant that one of us always got "stuck" as the game master because no civilian could manage the world to our satisfaction. A half-dozen good campaigns bit the dust because of attrition. We expected a lot from our players and weren't willing to water the game down enough to spoon feed them.

Here's to hoping that the second edition can bring our game back. We never gave up hope—and it looks like you all haven't been resting on your laurels. Maybe, just maybe, the second edition will give our non-servicemen friends enough of a boost to keep up with "Padre" and "the ell-tee."

CPL Keil Hubert

1st Texas Infantry (Mech)

I just picked up the 2nd edition *Twilight: 2000* rules, and I must say I am impressed. In 1984, I rushed out and bought the first edition rules as soon as I heard they were out. The concept was bold and new, the mechanics were excellent (with only minor glitches), the equipment and weapons lists were thorough, and the Bradstreet artwork was great.

My initial impression of the 2nd edition was: Good job—you made it one book, rather than two. The previous two-book format seemed rather arbitrary and confusing. The next thing that hit me was the smooth layout and excellent artwork. The line drawings are a welcome benefit to those gamers who aren't weapons

freaks, while the Timothy Bradstreet pictures simply astounded me—keep that man on your staff!

After thoroughly combing through the book, I came away very impressed by its completeness. The new character generation rules in particular give new depth to the roleplaying element of the game, while the modifications to combat get rid of some of the unnecessary tedium of paperwork. While I had no particular problem with the old three-shot rule, the new method of shot-counting seems fine. The reworking of the history of WWII was very clever, and it fits in nicely with your previously published modules. Lastly, the inclusion of the encounter maps and short scenarios was a nice touch; they ought to be a real boon to GMs. My hat goes off to you for a fine job.

Erik Schmidt
Watsonville, CA

My compliments for a long-awaited and unusually well-thought revision of the *Twilight: 2000* game. And then straight away to the less pleasant details: My subject is the representation of the Finnish army (SA-INT hereafter—the SA having nothing to do with the Soviet Army).

The army basic training and career are at a glance okay, except that the Sissi are not jump trained as such, although SA-INT does maintain a coy-sized (peace footing) airborne unit, *Laskuvarjojääkäri*, the equivalent of rangers with parachute training. The marine commandos, *Rannikkojääkäri*, receive Scuba: 1 and Small Boat: 1 as first-term skills, and Scuba should be added to the subsequent term skills of the USMC Force Recon. In addition, SA-INT puts heavy emphasis on the ability of an individual soldier to survive and conduct effective warfare on his own in the deeply forested terrain. Foraging: 1 should be included to the basic army training.

The more blatant inaccuracies are in the equipment listings. The Finnish bullpup AR described was developed for airborne troops, but was rejected by the army as the protruding sights had a habit of knocking the paratroopers' teeth in at touch-down. Some were manufactured for export, but there never were 5.45B firing bullpups as most of the export models use 5.56N or 7.62S. The military models, by the way, are capable of full auto.

The standard Finnish AR is still the fully machined m62rk, a progressive improvement over the AK-47, with wooden parts replaced by steel tubing and high-impact

Letters from our Readers

nylon, making the weapon both lighter and more robust. Other features include tritium night sights that make aiming in twilight conditions slightly easier, a folding trigger guard allowing firing when wearing mittens, and a hollow steel tube butt holding the cleaning equipment. The Israeli Galil is a straightforward copy of the m62rk, and a Galil-type folding stock version for airborne troops and vehicle crews is known as the m62tp. The AKM stats should be used except as follows: *Weight*: 3.5k, *Price*: \$350 (R/—) *Range*: 55.

By the way, when I fire short R&R bursts with the m62rk, I tend to get three-round bursts even though the weapon has no actual burst setting. The standard assumption for a burst is three rounds as opposed to five. After all, the weapon has a cyclic rate of a measly 650, compared to M16A2's 950.

The PK machinegun is used only in some Soviet-made vehicles, as the SA-INT has a standard Finnish machinegun, m62kk, hanging somewhere on the verge of a SAW and LMG. This is a completely different weapon from the m62rk and it can't use AR box magazines, so don't let the designation fool you. The m62kk has these stats: *Ammo*: 7.62S *Weight*: 8.5kg *Mag*: 100 belt *Price*: \$1500 (R/—) *ROF*: 10/10 (bipod) *Dam*: 3 *Pen*: 2-Nil *Blk*: 6 *SS*: 1/1 *Brst*: 6/3 *Rng*: 65/85.

The Makarov pistol has never been standard issue in SA-INT, and the standard sidearm is a high-capacity version of the FN (Browning) Hi-Power Mk1, also known as HP-35. Use the HP-35 stats, but with a *Mag* rating of 15. The SA-INT designation is m80. The border guard, *Rajajääkäri*, have adopted the French MAB Pistole Automatique-15 (PA-15).

Just to add a sniper rifle for Finnish characters, I introduce the m85. The m85 is the standard SA-INT bolt-action sniper rifle dating back to the '80s. It comes with a scope, bipod, and adjustable wooden stock and trigger. *Ammo*: 7.62L *Wt*: 5kg *Mag*: 5i *Price*: \$700 (R/—) *ROF*: BA *Dam*: 4 *Pen*: 2-3-Nil *Blk*: 4 *Brst*: — *Rng*: 75.

I think that the Finnish army info presented in the *Twilight* rules is now corrected.

Joona Vainio

Twilight Finnish co-translator

CHALLENGE APPRECIATION

What I most want to say is "thank you." You enrich the worlds I play on, or in. You make play much more varied. And you really make my being a GM much easier. With a bit of thinking and a liberal dose of a

healthy imagination, everything can be fit into almost any game, one way or another—if not the whole thing at the very least the *ideal* and the *feel* that the authors intended.

Edward W. Markle
Pleasant Grove, Utah

I have read *Challenge* and its predecessor for some time. I do not have much to argue with—maybe the dominant military view (forgive a former military serviceman—military life has lost all its glory for me).

In general, you have done just the opposite of the English magazine *White Dwarf*. At first it was a high-quality magazine with good articles for all games. Since issue 100, it has become virtually only an advertisement for its publisher, Games Workshop.

Challenge, in its part, was developed from an all-*Traveller*, all-GDW magazine to a magazine for other science-fiction games as well. That is why I am still reading it. I am not currently refereeing any game from GDW, but most of the information is usable for other games, too. Keep up the good work, as some tend to say. And, hey, how about a cultural theme issue?

Vesa Lehtinen
Finland

MERC: 2000 APPREHENSIONS

Twilight: 2000 2nd edition is a fine piece of work. I had no qualms on switching to the new format. My beef, which is unwarranted as of yet, is of the *Merc: 2000* scheduled for release soon. Those who have purchased the *Twilight* game and wish to own *Merc: 2000* would be buying repetitive rules. The era is the same, so the weapons, armor, combat, damage, skills, attributes, and equipment as a whole would be the same. The only difference would be in the history and background information—not enough difference to warrant an additional purchase.

My suggestion would be an additional supplement of the history and background info as well as any available equipment to the *Merc: 2000* game. I would love to have the new game when it finally becomes available, but not at the cost of a new game with repeat rules.

Curtis Royal
Jacksonville, Florida

I'm happy to say that your fears regarding *Merc: 2000* are groundless. No rules or equipment are repeated from *Twilight: 2000*. *Merc: 2000* provides a new chronology, new equipment (several items that make no sense in the *Twilight: 2000* situation), new weapons, new

vehicles, and a few new rules. *Combat* remains the same. Character generation is essentially the same (the big difference is that the last term isn't the war). I am pretty sure most of our customers will be pleased, except for the few who will be disturbed that they have to have *Twilight: 2000* to play *Merc: 2000* (you can't please everyone).

MEGATRAVELLER COVERAGE

I just want to say that I think that your coverage of *MegaTraveller* has improved greatly both in quality and quantity in the last issues. The only negative factor I can think of now is that the large number of non-GDW systems articles take up too much space in the magazine. Personally, my interest lies in the *MegaTraveller* area, but I realize that a more realistic approach would be for *Challenge* to concentrate on the GDW systems, with the occasional review of other systems thrown in. A magazine that spreads its coverage too thin might fall into the trap that the old readership is annoyed by the lack of coverage of the old subjects at the same time as the potential new readership doesn't have enough of impetus to begin reading it.

Bertil Jonell
Sweden

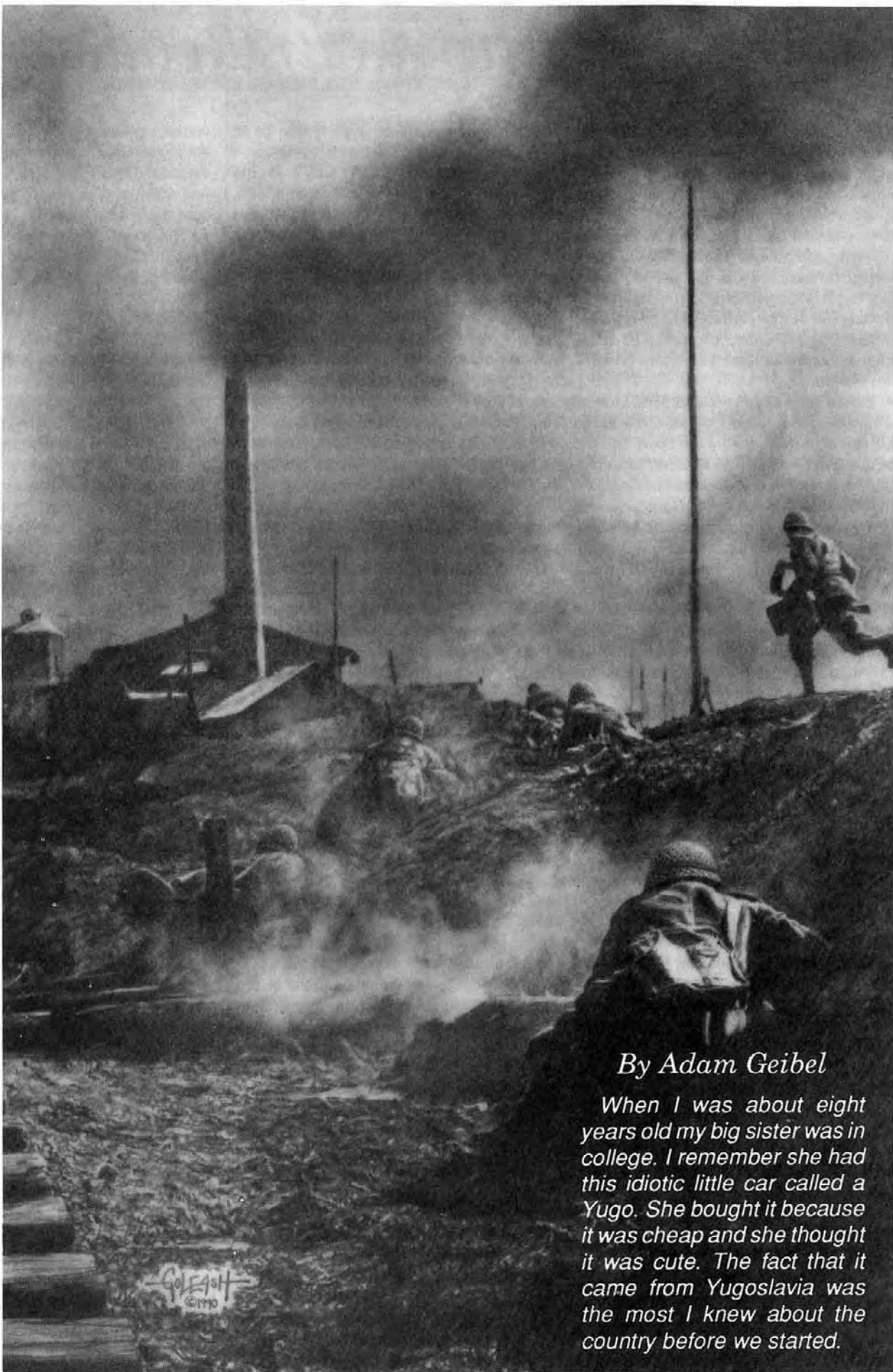
CYBER DISAPPOINTING

I have been running *2300 AD* since it first came out. The theme of the game being a hard-science RPG really attracted me. The only thing I am disappointed about is the *Earth/Cybertech Sourcebook*. The Earth part of the book is the only part worth my time. Granted that the book is well written throughout, with great history and maps, but the cybertech part I believe falls short of the hard science. I have researched many different forms of cyber stuff. Yours is probably the most realistic, but let's face it, who in their right mind would walk into a hospital off the street and ask for a perfectly good limb to be removed and replaced with something that will set off all airport scanners when you walk through. Personally, I would like to see an alternate Earth sourcebook and adventure modules with less cyber orientation.

Thomas C. Jarvis
Colorado Springs, Colorado

Have any comments on this issue? How about gaming in general? Letters from our Readers provides gamers an opportunity to air their views. The opinions presented do not necessarily reflect those of the magazine. *Challenge* reserves the right to edit letters. Write to *Challenge* Letters, PO Box 1646, Bloomington, IL 61702-1646 USA.

OUR FRIEND ALBANIA



By Adam Geibel

When I was about eight years old my big sister was in college. I remember she had this idiotic little car called a Yugo. She bought it because it was cheap and she thought it was cute. The fact that it came from Yugoslavia was the most I knew about the country before we started.

The Balkans has been a place of intrigue and shadowy operations throughout the 20th century. The Balkans War of 1912, WWI and WWII saw the area overrun with one army after another, only to be pestered by partisans. It is not a kind land for armies—the Turks, the Austro-Hungarians, the Germans and Italians have all suffered defeat in this land.

The shooting had hardly stopped in 1945 when another fight started—in Greece and Albania the communists vied for control, aided by the Soviets and Yugoslavians. The west won in Greece and lost in Albania. Forty years passed with relative quiet, and then the Twilight War erupted. The mountains had outlasted the armies once again.

Yugoslavia has a history of difficult assimilation of its various ethnic groups. With the collapse of the central government, feuding based on heritage became a popular hobby again. The Montenegrans hate the Serbs, who hate the Croats, and everybody hates the Albanians.

ALBANIA

Tucked into the Balkan coast just east of the straits of Otranto is the small nation of Albania, known to its natives as *Shqipëri* (Eagles' Country). Roughly crescent-shaped, with high mountains ringing coastal lowlands, Albania's prewar borders encompassed 28,748 square kilometers; it was over 300 kilometers long (north to south) and 100 kilometers wide. Nearly 70% of that land was mountainous, the rest verdant and acceptably fertile.

These mountains have traditionally offered the Albanians protection from their neighbors and enemies, as well as yielding rich deposits of coal, chromium, copper, iron and nickel. They can be delineated into three distinct, yet interlinking, ranges: the Northern Albanian Alps on the border with Yugoslavia, the central uplands (with Mt. Korab, at 2751 meters, Albania's highest peak) and the southern highlands bordering Greece.

The coastal plain offers arable land, and is shaped very much like a hand with its palm along the Adriatic and fingers following rivers back into the mountains. Much of the center of the coastal plain is marshy and, until the 1960s, underdeveloped.

Albania sits on a climate borderline. The southern segment hosts pleasant, subtropical Mediterranean temperatures, with citrus, figs, olives and even bananas growing where there is sufficient irrigation (July runs 27° C and dry; January averages 10° C with intermittent rain). The central coastal region offers a typical continental range in temperatures that is suitable for rice (July averages 25° C and is dry; January runs about 8° C and has changeable weather, usually

rainy). This coastal region, as far north as Split, is also touched by seasonal winds—the warm sirocco and bora in the winter and a cool, mountain mistral in the summer. The central regions and foothills boast grazing livestock and the occasional vineyard.

The mountains, however, can be much crueler even though they are so close. The climate is described as having a continental character. From the mountains around Sarajevo, down through Kosovo and along the border to Korçë, temperatures range from mild to brutal (July roughly averages 21.5° C and dry, and January holds at around -5° C with heavy precipitation and winds).

THE ALBANIAN PEOPLE

A fiercely independent people, the Albanians were strongly molded by 500 years of Turkish occupation. The Muslim heritage left behind could not be suppressed by even the staunchest communist indoctrination and started to surface again in the late 1980s. The population numbered some 3,686,000 citizens in 1995, one-third of whom resided in urban areas. At that time, the nation boasted some 60 towns and villages, most with running water, electricity and sanitation systems.

RECENT HISTORY

Albania has long been the most backward country of the European community. After liberating it from Italian occupation in 1944, the communists consolidated their hold on the country, intending to industrialize their weakened nation and enter the 20th century.

Albania's lack of sociability included other communist nations as well. Her leaders rejected the ideology and the domineering attempts at subversion by the Yugoslavians (in 1948) and the Soviets (in 1961) in a vain pursuit of "true communism." For years, Red China was Albania's only friend. Even that relationship cooled after Mao's death, leaving the small country to flounder through the rest of the 1970s and 1980s until the 1990s brought the winds of reform.

REFEREE'S NOTES

For those interested in fleshing out their campaigns in Albania, be prepared for a bit of disappointment. Beyond the contents of the *Encyclopedia Britannica*, there isn't much fresh information. Albania has not been particularly tourist oriented—a force which motivates most of the other nations behind the Iron Curtain. Most useful reference material was published back in the mid-1960s, and current information is practically nonexistent.

Points of interest include cities and geographic areas.

Berat: An anonymous mountain town, Berat's wartime population losses were

TWILIGHT: 2000

somewhat made up by the pitifully small numbers of refugees from Stalin. The current population is less than 1200.

Burrei: Burrei is a moderate-sized town that acts as processing center for the surrounding valley. The total population of the valley is 4750. To the northwest was once Lake Uzei. A wartime bombing raid damaged the dam, lowered the lake's level and washed out the road that parlayed the Fan River to the Adriatic. Other than the hardtop road from Peshkopi, the only other route out of town is a dirt road that leads over the mountains to the south.

Cerrik: Cerrik is a filthy little burg devoted to a refinery built by the Russians in the mid-1950s. Located along the heavy-duty highway to Durres, the refinery had a pipeline connecting it to the old fields near Stalin. NATO air units destroyed the refinery (and most of the Albanian Air Force, which was defending the complex) a few days after Albania entered the war.

Durres/Erzen River Mouth: Durres' lineage dates to the Roman Empire, when the town was the western terminus of the legions' highway to the east. Sitting on the Adriatic south of the Erzen River mouth, it was the largest and most important of the prewar ports. The area was rich with industrial and military targets, thus obtaining the dubious honor of being one of the few towns in Albania to be bombed with both conventional and tactical nuclear weapons during the war. The city sits on a knuckle of land at the southern end of a well irrigated, 30-kilometer-long triangular coastal plain, and has the potential for becoming a major agricultural breadbasket. To the north is the Erzen, while between the river and the city is a wide expanse of marshes.

The coastal highway is the only major road in and out of town (it is actually a spur route several kilometers from the main highway). To the south this route squeezes between a finger of the Kraab Mountains and the sea. The northern route passes over the Erzen at the only bridge, located in the village of Shijak, then up and over another spur of the Kraab. There it ties in with the highway to Tirane at the village of Vorre.

During the attacks, the surviving population fled into the mountains. Now about 10,000 Albanians live in and around Durres. The majority of the civilian population is involved in farming or scavenging. Durres was also the site of a spur line of the nation's railroad that serviced this basin and the

local civilian industries. It and the industries were the prime targets of a low-yield cruise missile. The city hosted a handful of civilian industries: a saw mill, flour mill, fish processing plant, tobacco factory and cement factory. The old harbor was surrounded by a dozen different warehouses, each holding some aspect of the civilian fishing fleets support organization, such as parts fabrication, hull and engine repair, carpentry, etc.

Elbasan: This city on the banks of the Shkumbia River was the administrative center for the mining district. Mines, some hundreds of years old, provided iron, lead, coal, coke, copper, gold, pyrites and the components of cement in abundance. Here was the huge Victory iron and steel complex, with smelters, foundries, and all manner of auxiliary industries around Elbasan. A cement factory supported local construction. Two coal-fired power plants were in operation, one dedicated just to the mining and processing operations. A total of 50,000 citizens lived and worked in the area.

NATO had sparse assets by the time Elbasan became a viable target, so only the power plants received detailed attention, while the vast Victory complex was only lightly damaged by misguided ordnance. With their power source heavily damaged, the plants and mines ground to a halt. Casualties from the bombings were relatively light, but disease and malnutrition took its toll, especially among the very young and old. By the year 2000, only 15,000 Albanians live within a 30-kilometer radius of Elbasan. While most of them are local skilled workers from the Elbasan industries, most now work as farmers in the sparse local fields.

Fier: This town sits on the coastal highway just south of the Seman River bridge. To the south is a ridge of the Mallakaster mountain range. To the north, as far as the southern banks of the River Shkumbia, is a plain of flat marshland. This stretch of land was developed as an agricultural project for growing rice (with small sections devoted to cotton), and was originally supervised by the Chinese. In the mid-1960s, a coal-fired, 400,000-kilowatt power plant was built to provide electricity for this operation. It was damaged and put out of operation four weeks after Albania entered the war. Without the local power grid, cultivation was more difficult, but not impossible. Even in the year 2001, paddies and fields extend from either side of the coastal highway.

Including the town of Lushje and five villages, Fier region's total population hovers around 35,000. Many live outside the villages in this basically peaceful area, with extended families clustered into small farming cooperatives. These, like the isolated settlements in the mountains, are usu-

ally dominated by a *kulla*, an Albanian fortified house similar to the American colonial blockhouse. One fear of the locals is that pirates, from Italy, the Aegean, or anywhere, will eventually discover the fertility of this region and start raiding. To date they have been lucky, but at least half of the local militia is kept patrolling the coast.

Gjirokaster: This town sits astride the Drino River Valley and is located about 15 kilometers from the Greek border. An arms museum in Ali Pasha's former fortress was emptied by the locals, and some of the operational antiques now stand guard along the Greek border. The old fortress now houses some 400 militiamen. Five thousand Albanians live in and around the town, their efforts making Gjirokaster self-sufficient in daily needs. The town's control extends down to the village of Gjurucat, now abandoned save for 50 militiamen. Beyond, at least as far as across the border to Vrosina (on the verdant upper valley of the Thyamis River), is a no-man's-land which is barren of human life.

Himare: The subtropical coastal area from the Vlorë Bay to the Greek border, known as the Ionian Riviera, is nearly isolated from the rest of the country and fairly apolitical. Its pastures, forests, hydroelectric plants and mining made it one of the more economically strong regions of Albania, and it suffered accordingly, as it was closer to the NATO airbases and an easier target to bomb. The mines and power plants are gone now, but the pastures and vineyards still produce a decent crop. The other communities strung out along this coast (the fishing villages of Dherm and Porte Palmera) and linked by the coastal highway will trade with anyone—even Greeks. All three have strong militias—some of 200 men.

Korcë: Korcë is another ancient city at the center of a primarily agricultural region which is sprinkled with small industries. On the border with Greece, the H-shaped Korcë Valley touches the southern end of Lakes Perspa and Ohrid. Korcë is the cantonment of the Albanian II Infantry Brigade.

Kosovo: Kosovo, some 60 kilometers due north, is on the other side of the Sar Planina, a towering spur of the Dinarics. This range is treacherous and, with some peaks well over 3000 meters high, frequently dusted with snow year round. The road that did traverse this range before the war (ending in Zur) is now little more than a gravel goat track. On the Albanian side of Route 26, just across the border, is the town of Lin. From here a four-lane gravel road heads south to the Korcë Valley.

Kukes: Just inside the border with Kosovo, this town straddles one of the few major east-west roads and the Drin River. Before the war, the Drin had been dammed in two places. The closer of the two had

formed a lake whose western edge reached all the way to Kukes. Both dams were destroyed by Yugoslavian commandos, and the lakes no longer exist. The subsequent flood caused extensive damage along the length of the river. The highway which goes through the town is roughly repaired in over a dozen places and is treacherous during the winter months.

The town is a collection of 200 or so stone houses around a downtown area of Soviet-style government and utilities buildings. The 1500 residents survive on sheep and fish; during the winter they are isolated from the lowlands. Another 300 Albanians live in single-family huts scattered on the mountainsides along the Drin between Kukes and the lowlands. Kukes is garrisoned by a small band of part-time militia.

Lake Ohrid: Geologists claim this is one of the deepest lakes in the world. It is over 30 kilometers long and half as wide. The water's temperature stays agreeable all year long. The lake is famed for its crystal-clear water and was internationally renowned for its fish. These fish now provide an important food supply for the area, and the surplus is exported to the east.

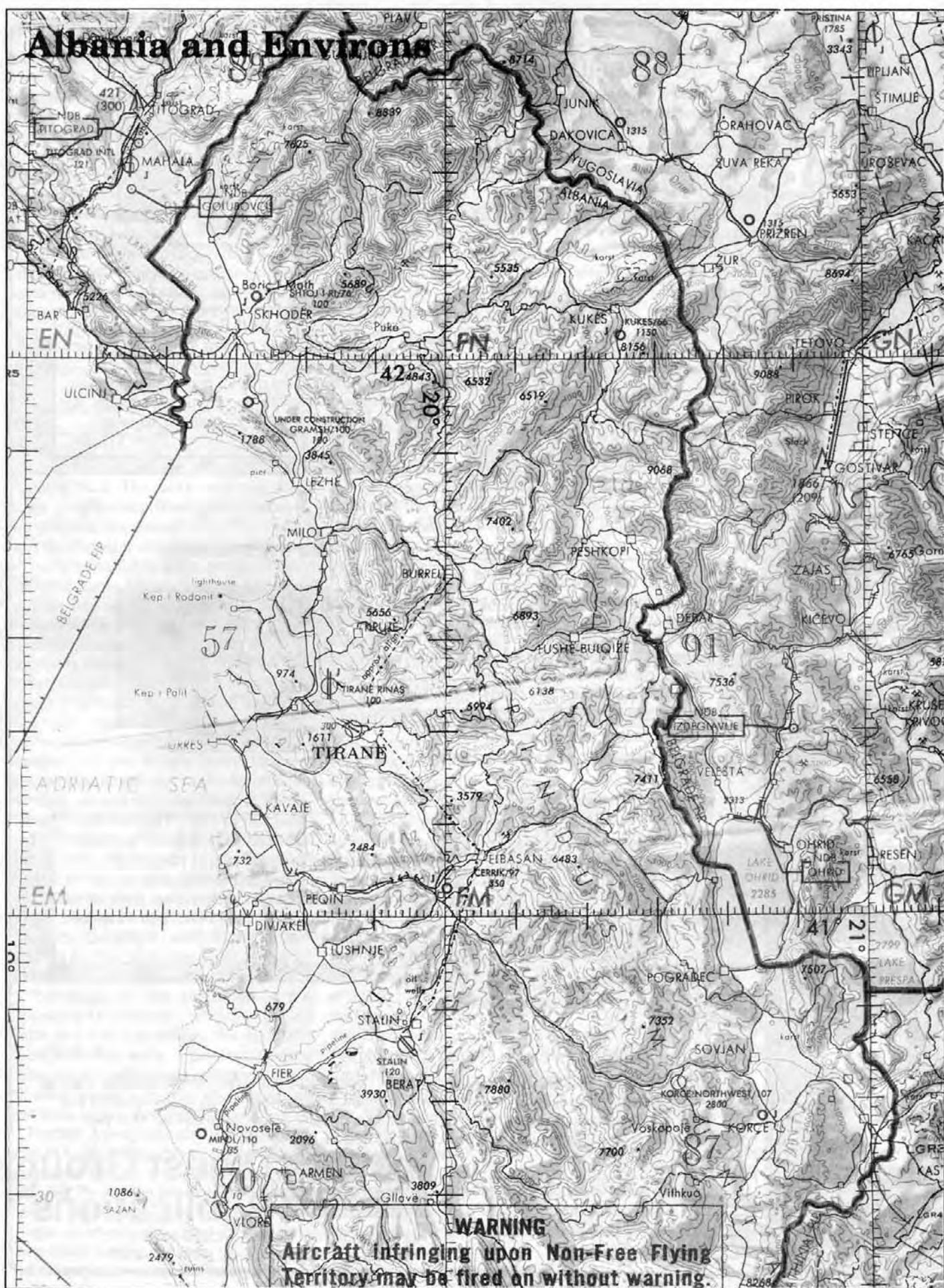
Milo: A little over 10 kilometers from the coast, on the Fan River, is the former industrial town of Milo. It boasts a small steel mill and a dozen ancillary and supporting factories that were only lightly damaged during the war. However, shortages of everything prevent any sort of decent production levels. Most of the skilled workers' time is spent keeping the machines from falling apart rather than manufacturing or repairing anything else.

The town was further damaged by the destruction of the Burrei Dam and the subsequent flooding. However, it is still intact enough to act as the region's administrative center, with regional authority extending inland to Reshan and Burrei, and along the coast from the Drin River to the Fan River. The locals have formed two militia brigades that spend most of their time engaged in reconstruction work or guarding warehouses and silos.

Ohrid: Inhabited since the 3rd century BC, Ohrid was a scenic and historic pearl of all Macedonia. This small Yugoslavian city (prewar population 32,000) was overrun by Albanian forces after fierce fighting, and the native Greeks and Serbs were driven out. A detachment of soldiers from the Albanian I Infantry Brigade are in cantonment here (along with a few hundred irregular militia and partisans), primarily to protect the northwestern territory from the Greeks.

Ohrid makes its living from the usual industries associated with livestock and fishing, lumbering and some local small-scale mining. All of the surplus is traded to Elbasan for manufactured or salvaged

Albania and Environs





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goods. Though there are strong picket posts of Albanian troops around Ohrid, the city has no walls or large fortifications, as it is too spread out. Five settlements are clustered around the north end of the lake, each hosting some 500 to 1000 residents. These settlements are of both old and new construction, including one group that occupies the old Ohrid Airport. Two villages of equal size (Velvesta to the northeast and Botun to the northwest) are now heavily fortified and defended by local citizens. The town of Botun is also connected to Ohrid by a double-track railroad. Though no engines remain, some rolling stock has been converted into horse-drawn vehicles to form a trolley of sorts to run along the line.

Ohrid is something of a crossroads. Yugoslavia's Highway 26 heads east from Ohrid to Bitola. However, the rest of Macedonia lies on the other side of the Stogovo and Demir Hisar mountain ranges. Highway 26 also starts its westward trek through Albania, to the Adriatic Coastal Highway here. The route continues east, down the Shkumbin River, past Elbasan to the village of Rogozhine. From Ohrid north runs the Yugoslavian border highway, used primarily by the Yugoslavian Army and heavy transport trucks before the war. This two-lane hardtop was heavily contested when Albanian forces invaded and is in deplorable condition, barely suitable for ox carts. It continues past Velvesta up along the Crni Drim River/Lake chain to the Radika Valley, where it turns east and crosses the Bistra mountain range to Gostivar.

The small town of Debar and half a dozen villages lie in the Radika Valley. Bits and pieces of useful salvage can be found in the remains, as well as marauders, scattered diehards who refused to become refugees, and the occasional Greek Communist Army patrol. The valley ends at the village of Hanovi (which is due east of Peshkopi), where the hardtop road turns east and a gravel road heads up into the mountains to the north. Debar now serves as the cantonment for the remainder of the I Brigade.

Patos: Halfway between Fier and Stalin is the village of Patos, located in the mountains 15 kilometers southeast of Fier. Patos was home to oilfields like the Stalin fields, including wells, a pipeline, storage tanks, and a small hydroelectric power plant. All were targets of conventional air strikes and were largely destroyed.

Permet: A small way station on the back road to Kosovo, this community sits above a two-lane hardtop that runs to the border village of Perat, then heads north to Korçë. Less than 500 people live in this mountain village, producing fine goat cheese and hand-hewn building stones.

Peshkopi: Peshkopi is another border town near Yugoslavia. The route to the town

is basically impassable in the winter to anything but the lightest traffic. Two parallel gravel roads, in poor repair, run north-south on either bank of the upper Drin and connect Kukes to Peshkopi. They continue east, over the mountains, to Burrei and are impassable to vehicles from late November to February. A macadam road runs south around the mountain range, then east past Burrei down the Mati Valley to Rubik. This road is passable to vehicles half of the time during the winter months.

A sleepy mountain town, Peshkopi is notable for being the coordination center for the Upper Drin River Terracing Project. In the mid-1980s, silt was dredged from the Drin lakes and trucked upriver to build a 30-kilometer stretch of arable land. The area currently produces a quarter of its prewar output in wool, mutton and grains. Peshkopi has a permanent population of 3500 and over 800 small buildings, with a smattering of light home industries. The majority of the inhabitants are shepherds and farmers, though a few merchants conduct limited trade with the Greeks. Five villages lie between the town and Kukes, with a total combined population of 2300. Local part-time militias are the only defense.

Rubik: A farming community of 1200 clustered around an administrative center, this unfortified town offers the usual services and industries associated with agriculture.

Sazan Island: Sazan Island was a major

Albanian naval base that was the target of repeated NATO strikes during the early stages of the Balkans war. It boasted Russian-built underground submarine pens and complexes, an airfield and a heliport, and also extensive coastal and anti-aircraft batteries. Current radiation levels (in the neighborhood of 200 to 1000 rads) make the island an extremely unattractive place to go souvenir hunting.

Shkodër/Shkodër Valley: An ancient city on the southern shores of Lake Scutari and straddling the Buene River, Shkodër survived the war with only minor damage inflicted on the small local industries and

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the Lehze Airfield to the south. Apart from some downed bridges and the damage around Shkodër, the only other loss in the area was a natural gas-fired, 200,000-kilowatt power plant at Va i Dejes, destroyed by NATO air raids and the Drin River flood.

Shkodër is a lucrative center of merchant activity, drawing agricultural goods, dried fish, lumber and some ore from the surrounding area. The river is navigable from the town to the sea, but the ruins of several bridges prevent passage to Lake Scutari. Apart from 30 small coastal sailboats (all under 75 tons) only five large (250- to 400-ton) merchant steamers are available to the city. These are all coal-fired and rigged with at least one sail mast.

The town serves as cantonment for the III Artillery Regiment of the Albanian Army, which, despite its name, is now mostly infantry (it has only four 122mm howitzers remaining and little ammunition for them). Shkodër also serves as a center for anti-American partisan activities directed against the Civgov 76th ID at Titograd.

The town dominates a fertile, river-laced

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valley and sits astride the easiest road to southwestern Yugoslavia. The current population of the valley and surrounding foothills numbers roughly 25,000, two-thirds of whom live in and around Shkodër proper—making it one of the larger towns on the 21st-century Ionian coast. The inhabitants are refugees from the mountains, from the fighting in the south and even as far away as Kosovo, attracted by the relatively benevolent climate of the Shkodër garrison commander. The valley also boasts a dozen villages, the town of Lezhe and the former Yugoslavian town of Ulcinj. Lezhe sits on the southern edge of the Shkodër Valley, close to the mouth of the Drin River.

Sirande: Sirande is a coastal fishing village across the strait from the Greek island of Corfu. The Albanian coastal highway ends here, and two secondary dirt roads continue to the border. Beyond is wilderness.

Stalin: Stalin is another filthy collection of Eastern Bloc concrete monstrosities housing the workers to the local coke plant, as well as those assigned to the oil wells in the upper Seman River Valley. Formerly, the Cerrik pipeline began in Stalin. A small hydroelectric plant was located at the dam 12 kilometers northwest of the town and a major airport/airfield was 10 kilometers to Stalin's south. All three were NATO targets, and all were destroyed. Fires burned for months afterward, and the local casualty rate ran close to 70%. The town is now unpopulated, but scavengers still comb the rubble for useful equipment and material.

Tirane: The capital of Albania straddles the Arzen River, 25 kilometers from the coast, at the head of a finger-shaped valley that runs from the south bank of the Drin up into the alps. The city is surrounded on three sides by these alps and has retained a Mediterranean flavor of architecture similar to that found in 1930s Italy. It even has an "old city" of stucco and red tile. The vista of wide boulevards and stately buildings was later marred by the post-WWII construction of Iron Curtain "cereal box" monstrosities.

Albania's most pressing prewar economic problem was developing the transportation system necessary to move its raw materials and goods to other markets. Tirane was the transportation hub of the nation, with a single-track, standard-gauge railroad (built in 1948) that ran from Tirane north to Milo, then south through Durres all the way to Fier. A spur line ran east up the Shkumbin River Valley to Librazhd. As the line ran through the three choice target areas in Albania, the majority of rolling stock and engines were obliterated during the war. Those remaining are slowly rusting in Librazhd, unable to move on the shattered lines.

Thanks to increased lumber harvesting and mineral exploitation, there were 3400 kilometers of paved roads and another 2000

kilometers of unimproved roads in Albania by 1995. Tirane was the crossroads of the nation, its main artery being a north-south, four-lane hardtop running from the Yugoslavian border (out of Titograd) through the capital to Sarande on the Ionian Riviera. The primary east-west highway also passes through Tirane, connecting Durres on the coast to Lin, the border checkpoint town in the Ohrid area of the Yugoslavian border. The east-west road and most of the bridges remain in excellent shape (for 2001), though their primary traffic is horse-drawn. (Vehicles have always been scarce in Albania, even before the war. Until the economic revitalization, the country had no capacity for producing its own and little more for spare parts fabrication.) Potholes and shoulder weeds aside, the only bottlenecks are at the Durres Tunnel and the Seman Bridge.

Although severely damaged by conventional air strikes in 1997-98 (directed at the transportation lines and destroying a third of the city), Tirane now serves as the center of what is left of the Albanian government, which actually controls little beyond the valley around the city. The city garrison consists of 800 militia (serving part-time) and the 500 men and three T-55s of the prewar tank brigade.

Upper Erzen River: To the south of Tirane is the Kraab Mountain chain, dividing southern and northern Albania. Though not particularly high (less than 500 meters), the terrain is difficult, even on foot. The Erzen River flows west to the sea on the north side of the chain. This river is crossable when frozen and fordable in the late summer.

Vlorë Bay Area: Located on Albania's coast at the confluence of the Adriatic and Ionian seas, this bay is surrounded on three sides by high mountains. Toward the north, the mountains veer away from the sea, and a coastal plain spreads out to the Vjose River. Sazan Island, the city of Vlorë, and the port town of Skala are the only points of interest in the area. Tucked into Narta Bay (itself a part of Vlorë Bay) is the port complex of Skala and Vlorë. The two communities have grown so that they are now indistinguishably linked, and they are a mixture of a military camp and farmers' market. In addition to the garrison, about 15,000 Albanians live in and around the Vlorë area (a radius of 20 kilometers). Vlorë's is the cantonment of the Albanian III Infantry Brigade.

Montenegro

Montenegro, in happier times, could have been a fairy-tale kingdom, with pleasant weather nearly year-round, castles by the seaside and lazy Mediterranean villas spread out on either side of them. Further inland lie isolated villages and picturesque mountains, and not much else. In Latin and the native tongue, the country's name

translates to "black mountain," in reference to Mount Lovcen and the surrounding stark mountains. Apart from the coastal strip and a sprinkling of valleys and lakes, the land is not black, but is basalt gray and as desolate as the moon.

Montenegro lies on the southern edge of Yugoslavia's Adriatic coast, where the Dinaric Alps parallel the sea. The alps rise from the narrow coastal plain and continue for over 300 kilometers inland, finally dropping to form the Sava River Valley, though Montenegro extends only some 150 kilometers to the Cetina branch of the Drina.

The alpine spine's center, while studded with mountains and ridges, could be considered a plateau and is sprinkled with small verdant valleys. Parts of Montenegro's interior were declared a national park, centered on what was the Dumitor mountain range in the southern Dinarics. The Dumitor marks the division of Montenegro's waters—those to the west flow into the Adriatic; those to the east into the Danube.

The area is also dotted with karstic formations, many of the smaller ones never appearing on any maps. These geological oddities are caused by Venetian deforestation which took place three to four centuries ago. Rainwater runoff erodes the permeable limestone substrata, and the covering layer forms bowls, sinkholes (*dolines*) or even large fields (*poljes*). *Dolines* and *poljes* collect fertile soil and have long supported farming communities. The fields often have rivers that disappear at one end and reappear at the other. Heavy rains at the end of winter can cause flooding and small lakes to appear around these karstic watercourses. These formations also form long and complicated underground caves as spectacular as anything in fantasy literature. During the Twilight War, locals used them to escape bombings and invasions, much as the WWII Yugoslavian partisans squirreled away munitions and other supplies to resist the Germans.

Before the war, Montenegro had been busy fighting its heritage of poverty and backwardness. The Beograd government had sunk funds into roads, fertilization and reforestation projects, factories and tourist sites. With the coming of the war, however, Montenegro has once again turned inward to concentrate on the business of survival.

The old Dalmatian coast (typical of the whole Adriatic coast) sports cypress, olive and pine trees on its mountain slopes. Typical European deciduous trees can also be found in the area, but the percentage of forest composed of pine trees increases as one travels inland. Olives, figs, grapes and grains thrive throughout the area, while grazing pastures supported sheep, goats, and horses before the war. Most domesticated farm animals were also prevalent before the

war, as were pigs in the non-Islamic areas. Montenegrans are an ethnic derivation of the Slavs. Montenegro has enjoyed self-determination for more than a dozen centuries, even during the period when the Turkish hordes had conquered all its neighbors, thanks to its difficult location and headstrong people. Few refugees from elsewhere made it into the Montenegrin area due to the mountains and severed coastal roads. Concentrations of ethnic Croats can be found just north of Split, while a handful of Serbs from the Danube plain can be found in Montenegro's interior.

Dinaric Alps

Travel from the Danube plain to the Adriatic, except along established roads, is difficult in the summer months and impossible after the snow starts falling. Roads of any sort through the mountains were formerly few—improved roads, even fewer. Multilane hardtop highways were the rarest and were a key ingredient to a successful Soviet domination of Yugoslavia. However, such mountain avenues were also easily defended. They were mined, demolished and fought over with incredible intensity by both sides during the war, and most are currently in atrocious shape. Complete passage by vehicle from point to point is usually impossible, and by mule or foot it is difficult.

In addition to collapsed tunnels and bridges, the remote sections are often clogged with the rusting wrecks of old battles. Many are untouched or forgotten, or their location is too difficult to reach. Those that still sport valuable salvage will surely attract marauders.

Another common sight on these roads are skeletons. Hundreds upon hundreds of refugees died here in the first months of the war. Their remains now carelessly litter the shoulders and drainage ditches.

The marauders that infest these alps usually travel in small groups (from three to 60 members), are indifferently armed, and are usually not too experienced, bright or healthy. They can, however, be dangerous to those who let their guard down. II Corps last estimated as many as 1000 separate groups of marauders. They can be (but are usually not) of mixed ethnic and social origin; all are motivated by greed.

Balkan Road Nomenclatures: The only autobahns are hundreds of kilometers away, on the other side of the alps. A Montenegrin highway is usually a four-lane asphalt or concrete avenue with gravel shoulders. Routes are two-lane hardtops with gravel shoulders. Secondary roads are two-lane gravel affairs or single-lane hardtop with gravel shoulders. Unimproved roads are hard-packed dirt.

Kosovo

Life in Kosovo has not changed much since the beginning of the war. Kosovo was

always considered a wilderness by the rest of Yugoslavia and one of the most backward regions of Europe. Even as the rest of Yugoslavia became a smokestack economy, industry in Kosovo was almost nonexistent, and mines remained unproductive despite federal programs to exploit local natural resources. The regional unemployment level peaked at 30% in 1990.

The prewar population of autonomous Kosovo was two million ethnic Albanians. It had the highest growth rate in Europe, at 3% annually. Another 150,000 Serbians lived a tenuous existence in the region, the object of Albanian ethnic violence.

The catastrophe of the Third World War changed little. Home heating often was and still is by wood stove, and donkeys have always provided the bulk of personal transportation. By the year 2000, entry in Kosovo was difficult—impossible if someone actively wanted to keep you out. Three improved roads toiled over the Dinarics into Kosovo Field from Montenegro; another three hard-packed trails and Highway 25 entered from Albania. By the end of the century, all of these except Highway 25 were in extremely bad shape. Upper Kosovo could only be reached from Kosovo Field by Highway 25 and an improved road from Pec.

Bar: This town sits on the Aegean side of the Dinaric Alps' southern tail. The only remaining populated settlement in the area, Bar hosts some 3000 residents, mostly fishermen, shipbuilders and their families. Neighboring Novi

Bar, a communications and commerce hub bombed heavily during the war, now resembles the ruins of Stari Bar (a nearby mountain town destroyed by the Turks 125 years earlier). Novi Bar had been a major port in southern Yugoslavia, as well as the Adriatic end of the Bar-Beograd Railway, a 25-year project completed in 1976. The line wound through 476 kilometers of mountains, with 254 tunnels and over 234 bridges. It has been cut in scores of places since the war began and is passable for short distances only.

Directly west, on the other side of the alps, is Lake Scutari. The road over the alps has been cut in several places by natural and man-made efforts, as has

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the highway north to Kotor Bay. The road to the south is infested with Albanian partisans.

Cetinje: This small town, set on a verdant plateau in the mountains overlooking Kotor Bay, is once again the capital of Montenegro. Largely undamaged by the war, this settlement serves as a collection hub for agricultural produce from inland and for fish from the coast. It also lacks the usual filth associated with surviving towns of the postwar era. Except for the blockhouses at either end of the town, Cetinje does not sport the fortifications and mobs of armed troops which sprawl everywhere else. While Cetinje is an open town, outsiders will be noticed, politely questioned by the militia, and subjected to a moderate degree of scrutiny and interrogation.

Kotor: Kotor was a sprawling development with a core old city crowded against the Adriatic by the Dinarics. Unlike Dubrovnik, it has the protection of a large natural bay, which has made it an attractive and safe haven for shipping since the time of the ancient Greeks. Ruled by the Venetians until the beginning of the 19th century, then held by the Austrians until Yugoslavians

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self-rule, the city was again occupied by the Italians and Germans during WWII.

During the Third World War the local naval base and airfield were destroyed by the Italians. Later, Italian forces landed here as part of an effort to link up with Soviet forces approaching from the east. Much of the town was comprised of ancient buildings, already weakened by a 1979 earthquake, and they crumbled when token resistance to the Italian task force was crushed.

Most of the population of 8000 perished in the sudden attack. Currently, the only life in the area of the town is a small garrison in Fort St. John, overlooking the bay. This work perches 260 meters above the bay, with walls 20 meters high and 10 meters thick. The garrison is armed with Italian small arms, acquired when the Italian units retreated to this area and dissolved. Other moments of the collapse are the hulks of Italian vehicles on the roadsides and several vessels sunk in the harbor, visible from the bay's heights.

Further out toward the straits where the fishing is better, there is an Italian merchantman capsized on the north side of the channel. Laying in only five fathoms of water, its hull acts as an artificial island. The locals have already cut holes in the plating and salvaged what they can.

The seven or eight villages around the bay have all been damaged and looted by the visiting Italians, yet they are still occupied. Each now hosts between 200 and 500 residents who farm small local plots.

Mahala: This is a village south of Highway 2 in the Scutari Lake Valley that was unfortunately too close to the Titograd Airport/Airbase. This installation, as well as Mahala, was incinerated with air/fuel munitions by the Italian Air Force early in the war. Bits and pieces of salvage can still be picked up from these ruins, provided one is wary of dogs and the occasional marauder.

Niksic: The town of Niksic is linked to Trebinje by Highway 6. It boasted an industrial suburb that processed the ores mined from Montenegro's mountains. Its power plant attracted Italian and Albanian air raids that damaged other sections of the town. The current population of 1600 civilians is busy salvaging machines and parts from the factories. In the heyday of the salvage efforts, hundreds of tons of goods were stored here before being shipped to the coast.

Ostrog: A village flattened in the war, Ostrog attracts no attention from the unsavory elements that pass through the area. However, hidden and protected by switchback roads that teeter over deep ravines is an old monastery cut into the overhanging mountainside. It is now occupied by four families, who survive by remaining unseen. They loot Ostrog's remains at night, farm small gardens, and tend a handful of domesticated animals.

Pluzine: Pluzine is a small village just off Highway 18 (the Sarajevo-Titograd Road) near the southern end of Lake Bioc. Due to the poor condition of the road and general lack of inhabitants in the area, this stretch is infrequently traveled and is perfect for a band of marauders. Twenty of them call this village home and live in relative splendor on what they loot from ruins along the highway. Typical of the bands that plague the mountains like gnats, these people are vicious but less than competent. Some were former soldiers, but most are displaced unfortunates. The marauders are heavily armed with a bizarre collection of small arms. Each walks around festooned with pistols, grenades, crossbows and a pair of rifles or light machineguns. This habit had caused some casualties in the past, through accidents and duels. Duels are outlawed within the group, but accidents still happen. These marauders have 30 horses, mules and donkeys, as well as three civilian trucks converted to run on alcohol. They also have five stills, half a dozen captives from a merchant caravan they ambushed some time ago, and a nice 50/500km radio.

Sveti Stefan: A tiny island town in Budva Bay linked to the mainland by a narrow causeway, Sveti Stefan was originally a fishing village converted to a luxury "hotel community" in 1960. Throughout the war it was held in turn by the Yugoslavian Army, refugees, Italians and Albanians. The last two groups, who had been using the island and adjacent mainland Milocer Hotel as a hospital and rear area headquarters, were massacred last year by marauders. History has come full circle now, and Sveti Stefan is once again a home to fishermen. Some 300 live on the island, along with their families. Each night their two dozen sailboats are anchored in the bay, just off the causeway's sandy beaches. The Milocer Hotel is still used as a rest area and hospital by the Yugoslavian II Corps. It is now guarded only by a militia unit, as attack overland from the south is next to impossible. Though still picturesque from a distance with its orange tile roofs and old gray stone, Sveti Stefan now exists in a mediaevalsque squalor of chimney smoke, trash and stench.

Titograd/Lake Scutari Valley: The city of Titograd lies on the north side of the marshy Lake Scutari plain. Ninety percent of the old town, then known as Podgorica, was destroyed during WWII. More recently, Titograd held no worthwhile targets for air attacks and was overrun by the Albanians too quickly to be really damaged. The subsequent fighting between Americans and the Albanians also caused some damage, but the worst destruction was caused by the civilian population panicking when the Albanians invaded. The town's citadel is now the headquarters of the US 76th ID.

Perhaps 5000 souls—farmers, fishermen and their families—live in the valley where the Moraca River flows into Lake Scutari. Clustered in small farms of three or four families each, they raise grain and vegetables or harvest fish from the lake. They are apolitical and are merely trying to survive these hard times. Patrols of the 76th make frequent appearances to counter Albanian partisan raids from Shkodër.

Many small caves are located in the three major karstic formations, and untold minor ones lie along the road to Shkodër. These often house refugees or cave-dwelling animals.

Tivat: Located just inside the mouth of Kotor Bay, Tivat was only lightly damaged during the war despite its shipyard and small naval harbor. A pottery industry and a number of skilled boat builders bring fishermen from along the coast to trade for the locally manufactured goods and trade goods from inland. □

DMAA maps in 1:1,000,000 and 1:500,000 scale were used in this article—Sheets ONC F-2, F-3 and G-3 in 1:1,000,000 and TPC F-2 B & C, F-3 A & D, and G-3 A-D. For more detail, ask for a catalog and price list of government maps from the following. For civilian users of Defense Mapping Agency Aerospace Center products: NOAA Dsst Branch (N/CG33), National Ocean Service, Riverdale, MD 20737. For Defense Mapping Agency-type maps: DMA Office of Distribution Services, Washington, D.C. 20315-0010, or US Army Topographical Command, Washington, D.C. 20315.

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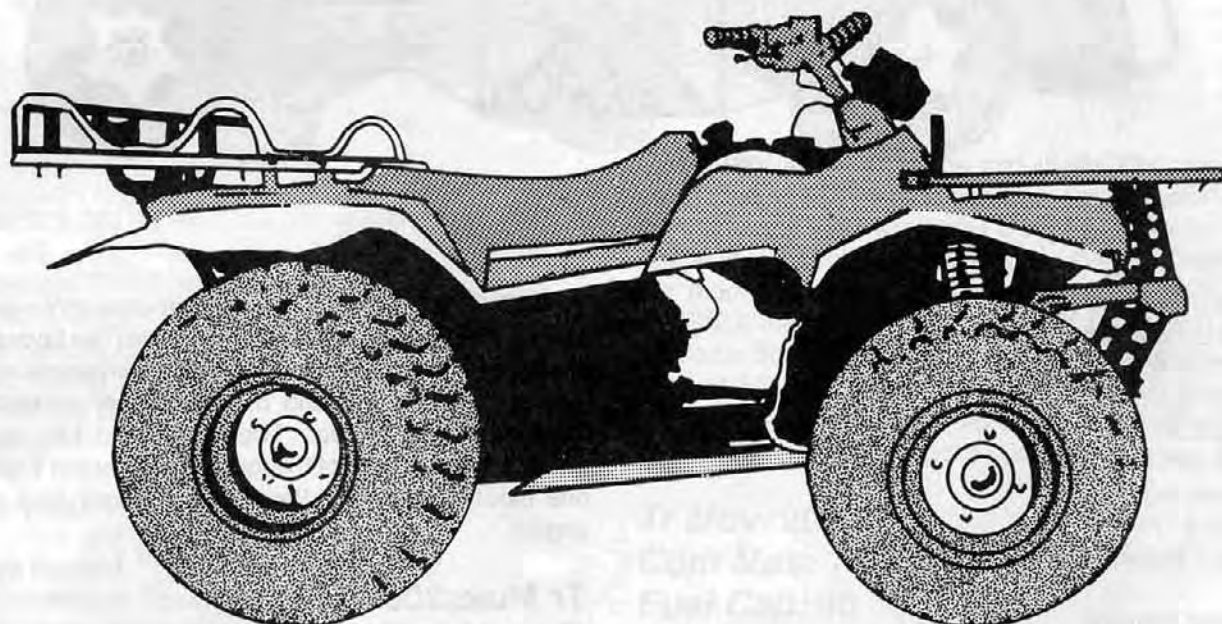
DEALER INQUIRES WELCOME

USED CAR LOT

Jason English

This article details three American vehicles that could be encountered (or used) in **Twilight: 2000**. In any event, these vehicles offer a **Twilight: 2000** adventuring party a way to add a little more flavor to their encounters (and perhaps might inspire them to come up with their own vehicles as well).

Quad Runner



Price: \$10,000 (R)
 Armament: None
 Fuel Type: G, A
 Load: 50 kg
 Veh Wt: 250 kg
 Crew: 1
 Mnt: 2
 Night Vision: Headlights

Damage Record

Crewmembers: Driver ☐
 Sight/Vision: Night vision equipment ☐
 Radio: ☐
 Weapon (If Any): ☐
 Engine: ☐
 Fuel (% Consumed or Destroyed): ☐☐☐☐☐☐☐☐☐☐
 Suspension: Minor damage ☐ Immobilized ☐

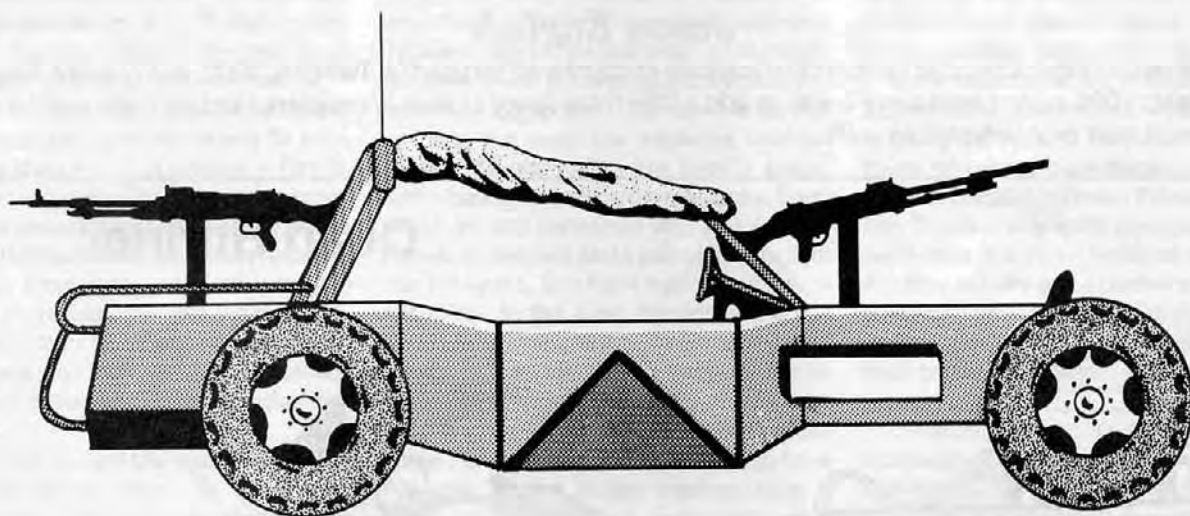
Quad Runner: One of a variety of 4x4 all-terrain vehicles that were immensely popular in the civilian market before the war. They are now used by military and civilian units for off-road scouting and patrol duties. They are only found in North America; therefore, only one availability code is given.

Tr Mov: 170/100
Com Mov: 60/35
Fuel Cap: 25
Fuel Cons: 20

Combat Statistics

Config: Std	HF: 1
Susp: W(2)	HS: 1
	HR: 1

NMC-40 Warrior FAV



Price: \$20,000 (R/—)
 Armament: MAG MG (P), MAG MG (P)
 Ammo: 660, 7.62 N
 Fuel Type: D, G, AvG, A
 Load: 350 kg
 Veh Wt: 1.5 tons
 Crew: 1+2
 Mnt: 4
 Night Vision: Headlights

Damage Record

Crewmembers: Driver ☐
 Passengers: 1 ☐ 2 ☐
 Sight/Vision: Night vision equipment ☐
 Radio: ☐
 MAG MG: F ☐ R ☐
 Engine: ☐
 Fuel (% Consumed or Destroyed): ☐☐☐☐☐☐☐☐☐☐
 Suspension: Minor damage ☐ Immobilized ☐

NMC-40 Warrior FAV: An experimental three-seat version of the US Army's fast attack vehicle. The layout differs slightly from the standard FAV in that a third seat is mounted between the engine and the passenger compartment, facing toward the rear. There are also two weapons mounts—one in front of the forward passenger's seat, and one mounted between the rear passenger seat and the engine.

Tr Mov: 200/140

Com Mov: 70/60

Fuel Cap: 30

Fuel Cons: 10

Combat Statistics

Config: Stnd HF: 1
 Susp: W(2) HS: 1
 HR: 1

AMMUNITION

Use the MAG MG ammo records found in the **American Combat Vehicle Handbook**.

WEAPON DATA

Weapon	ROF	Dam	Pen	Blk	Mag	—Recoil—		
						SS	Brst	Rng
MAG MG	10	4	2-3-Nil	6	50B	1	9	65
bipod	10	4	2-3-Nil	6	50B	1	5	90
tripod	10	4	2-3-Nil	6	50B	1	4	125

HMMWV Avenger



Price: \$25,000 (R/R)

RF: +20

Armament: PMSS, M2HB MG (coaxial)

Ammo: 8 Stinger SAMs, 175x.50 BMG

Fuel Type: D, G, A

Load: 150 kg

Veh Wt: 2.5 tons

Crew: 3

Mnt: 5

Night Vision: Headlights

Damage Record

Crewmembers: Commander ☐ Driver ☐ Gunner ☐

Sight/Vision: Night vision equipment ☐

Traverse: ☐

Radio: ☐

PMSS: ☐

M2HB (Coaxial): ☐

Engine: ☐

Fuel (% Consumed or Destroyed): ☐☐☐☐☐☐☐☐☐☐

Suspension: Minor damage ☐ Immobilized ☐

HMMWV Avenger: In the mid-1980s, General Electric developed an ADA vehicle based on the HMMWV chassis to fill an army requirement for a light air defense vehicle. The Avenger's only difference from a standard HMMWV is the mounting of the pedestal-mounted Stinger system (PMSS) in the cargo bed. The PMSS is a turret housing four twin-tube Stinger launchers (eight tubes altogether) along with a M2HB machinegun. Since the turret's aiming systems are computer controlled, firing Stingers from the PMSS is an Average:(Heavy Weapons+Computer) task.

Tr Mov: 200/60

Com Mov: 70/25

Fuel Cap: 90

Fuel Cons: 30

Combat Statistics

Config: Stnd TF: 1 HF: 1

Susp: W(2) TS: 1 HS: 1

TR: 1 HR: 1

AMMUNITION

Use the .50 BMG ammo records found in the **American Combat Vehicle Handbook**.

Stinger Missiles (8)

☐☐☐☐☐☐☐☐

WEAPON DATA

—Recoil—

Weapon	ROF	Dam	Pen	Blk	Mag	SS	Brst	Rng
M2HB	5	8	2-2-3*	8	105B	3	14	65
tripod	5	8	2-2-3*	8	105B	2	7	150

*.50 SLAP ammunition has a penetration of 1-1-2.

WEST END GAMES' December releases include *Queenswrath* (Torg), and *Galaxy Guide 6: Tramp Freighters* and *Galactic Races* (Star Wars). Other new products include *Death in the Undercity*, *Rebel Alliance Sourcebook* and *Zero-G Assault Troopers* (Star Wars), and *The Nightmare Dream*, *The Aysle Sourcebook* and *The Cassandra Files* (Torg).

DARK CONSPIRACY, the roleplaying game of modern horror, releases from GDW in February. A lurking horror feeds on human pain, provoking chaos and disaster in the world. Dark minions from another reality lurk in the ruins of Earth's decaying cities and carrying out the fiends' evil bidding; border wars rage between high-tech hoverships and armies of dusty trudging infantry; street gangs and cyberenhanced mercenaries

battle in the cities. Only a few men and women see the pattern that runs behind the chaos. They must marshal their inner strength and rally the best of 21st-century technology to battle the unspeakable nightmare that lurks on the threshold of our universe. Intrigued? See the eight-page pull-out section in this issue of **Challenge**.

CHAOSIUM's recent releases include *Cthulhu Casebook*, a collection of nine terrifying adventures for *Call of Cthulhu* (No. 3305, \$19.95.). And *Mansions of Madness*, five tales on the haunting of a mansion by denizens of the Cthulhu Mythos (No. 2327, \$17.95.).

ICE's December releases include *Olympians*, *Dark Space*, *Rolemaster Heroes & Rogues*, and *Black Guard: The Ptolemean*

Wars. Also available are *Alien Enemies*, *Rolemaster Character Records*, *Black Troll's Vengeance*, *Storm Riders*, *In the Shadow of Dol Guldur*, and the *Black Guard* series of ships for use with *Silent Death* (Dart fighter, Talon fighter, Lance Electra fighter, Sentry fighter, Star Raven gunboat, and Beta-fortress gunboat). Write to ICE, PO Box 1605, Charlottesville, VA 22902.

VORTEX, the new magazine of roleplaying and fantasy games, will release in March 1991. Write to Vortex Publishing, 5506 Beaudry St., #C., Emeryville, CA 94608.

ABALONE, the exciting new strategy game, was the hit of the convention season this year. Call (800) 666-5040 for more information.

MINIATURES available from Alternative Armies. Look for Free Companies, Shai Khan Goblin Troopers, Goblin Wolf Riders II, Celtic Myth, Lizardmen, and Harpy, Daemon and Werewolf. Write to Alternative Armies, Unit 6, Parkway Court, Glaisdale Parkway, Nottingham, UNITED KINGDOM NG8 4GN.

THE ETERNAL SOLDIER is the new *Twilight: 2000* newsletter from GDW. Includes adventure ideas, new equipment, optional rules, helpful hints, and the latest in military hardware and affairs. Write to GDW, PO Box 1646, Bloomington, IL 61702-1646.

BILL BARTON GAMES announces *Cool Zulus by Gaslight/Invaders of Delost*, Ark, releasing in November. Also available are *So Ya Wanna Be a Rock 'n' Roll Star*, *Rock On! Hexpads*, and *The Combat Zone*. Write to Bill Barton Games, PO Box 26290, Indianapolis, IN 46226-0290.

THE SCROLL is a new RPG magazine for the dedicated gamer. Each issue includes articles on every aspect of roleplaying, detailed fantasy shops, exciting fiction, reviews, classifieds, letters, and more. Write to *The Scroll*, PO Box 14616, Portland, OR 97214.

THE ARMORY offers spray primer quick-dry undercoat in black, white, and gray, and spray matte sealer quick-dry clear overcoat. Plus a wide variety of dice and other items. Write to the Armory, 4145 Amos Ave., Baltimore, MD 21215.

THE LAND OF KARRUS is a new PBM gaming adventure presented by Paper Tigers. Looking for an original mix of econom-

Origins Awards

The Academy of Adventure Gaming Arts and Design recently announced the winners of the Origins Awards for the best adventure gaming products of 1989. The Origins Awards are given for outstanding achievement in miniatures games, role-playing games, boardgames, play-by-mail games, computer games, and adventure gaming magazines.

The awards are presented annually at Origins, the national adventure gaming convention. This year's Origins host was DragonCon.

Challenge contratulates this year's winners:

Best Historical Figure Series: Aztecs, 25mm, Falcon Miniatures.

Best Fantasy or Science Fiction Figure Series: *Dragonlance AD&D* Figures, Ral Partha Enterprises, Inc.

Best Vehicular Miniatures Series: *BattleTech* 'Mechs and Vehicles, Ral Partha Enterprises, Inc.

Best Accessory Figure Series: *Warhammer* Mighty Fortress, Games Workshop, Inc.

Best Miniatures Rules: *Battle System Miniatures Rules*, TSR, Inc.

Best Roleplaying Rules: *AD&D 2nd Edition*, TSR, Inc.

Best Roleplaying Adventure: *The Great Old Ones*, Chaosium, Inc.

Best Roleplaying Supplement: *Creatures of the Dreamlands*, *Call of Cthulhu*, Chaosium, Inc.

Best Graphic Presentation of a Roleplaying Game, Adventure or Supplement: *Creatures of the Dreamlands*, *Call of Cthulhu*, Chaosium, Inc.

Best Pre-20th Century Boardgame: *Siege of Jerusalem*, The Avalon Hill Game Company Inc.

Best Modern Day Boardgame: *Red Storm Rising*, TSR, Inc.

Best Fantasy or Science Fiction Boardgame: *Space Hulk*, Games Workshop, Inc.

Best Graphic Presentation of a Boardgame: *Red Storm Rising*, TSR, Inc.

Best Fantasy or Science Fiction Computer Game: *Curse of the Azure Bonds*, Strategic Simulations, Inc.

Best Military or Strategy Computer Game: *Sim City*, Maxis.

Best Professional Adventure Gaming Magazine: *Dungeon Magazine*, TSR, Inc.

Best Amateur Adventure Gaming Magazine: *The Canadian Wargamers Journal*, The Canadian Wargamers Group.

Hall of Fame: Jim Ward.

ics, exploration, diplomacy, roleplaying and combat? Write to Paper Tigers, PO Box 1547, Glendora, CA 91740.

GREY WORLDS is a new bimonthly publication for the roleplaying games of ICE. Includes *MERP*, *Rolemaster*, *Space Master*, and *Cyberspace*. Write to Grey Worlds, 123 Heritage Lane #204, Denton, TX 76201.

FROM CHESSEX, look for *Sherlock Holmes' West End Adventures* and *Dragonskins* vinyl book covers. Write to Chessex, 2990 San Pablo Ave., Berkeley, CA 94702.

HEY DUDES—it's *Bill & Ted's Excellent Adventure*, the bodacious new computer game from Capstone Software. Other Capstone programs include *Trump Castle—the Ultimate Casino Gambling Simulation*, *Search for the Titanic*, *Superman: The Man of Steel*, *Miami Vice*, and Tom Clancy's *Cardinal of the Kremlin*. Write to Intracorp Inc., 14160 SW 139th Court, Miami, FL 33186.

PHANTASMECH is the BPM game of the future, providing all the ease of play of a computer game, and all the detail and involvement of a hand-moderated game. Journey through the labyrinth, full of cybernetic and organic creatures, player Meks, and other things to task your skills. Write to Phantasmech/Crasiworld, 4 Crescent Ave., Cleveleys, Blackpool, Lancashire, FY5 3JE, UNITED KINGDOM.

TALES OF THE DARK AGES, an anthology of *Ars Magica* adventures, is now available from Atlas Games. Also coming in November is *Stalenric*, an *Ars Magica* campaign and adventure supplement. Write to Atlas Games, PO Box 406, Northfield, MN 55057.

CHILL is now available from Mayfair Games. A complete roleplaying horror world, *Chill* is a revised version of the award-winning *Pacesetter* game of the same name. Also available is the *Chill Accessory Pack* and *Vampires Sourcebook*. Contact Mayfair Games, 5641 Howard St., PO Box 48539, Niles, IL 60648.

THE COMPLETE GUIDE TO ROLE-PLAYING GAMES by Rick Swan is available from St. Martin's Press. Write to St. Martin's, 175 Fifth Ave., New York, NY 10010.

COLUMBIA GAMES INC. announces *The Tome of Gray Mysteries*, a *HarnMaster* supplement of ancient wisdoms of the venerable and esoteric orders of the Shek-

Pvar. Write to Columbia Games Inc., Box 8006, Blaine, WA 98230.

THE ARCHERON ARMOURY provides high-quality, safe, latex-covered LRP weapons. Write to The Archeron Armoury, 7 Provost Fraser Drive, Mastrick, Aberdeen, SCOTLAND AB2 5LQ.

THE BATTLETECH CENTER is now open in Chicago. You are at the controls of the most deadly machine ever built, the Battlemech. From your cockpit you look out across the battlefield at the enemy, not controlled by the computer, but by other humans. You have to out-think and out-maneuver them or die trying! Battletech Center, North Pier, Mezzanine Level, 435 E. Illinois St., Chicago, IL.

STEVE JACKSON GAMES' December releases include *GURPS Uplift*, *GURPS Time Travel*, *Roleplayer 23*, and *Autoduel Quarterly 8/4*. Also available are *Car Wars Tanks*, *Awful Green Things from Outer Space*, *GURPS Magic Items*, *GURPS Martial Arts*, *Car Wars Card Game*, and *Ogre/GEV*. Write to Steve Jackson Games, Box 18957, Austin, TX 78760.

ALTERNATE REALITIES is a monthly gaming newsletter produced by Science Fact, Fiction, and Fantasy Club. Write to Alternate Realities, 4901 Evergreen Road, ROC Bldg., Rm. 210, Dearborn, MI 48128.

TROLL'S LUNCH is a new RPG fanzine produced by Luna Ventures. Includes generic gaming articles to system-specific articles or adventures. Write to Troll's Lunch, 6549 Creekhead Road, Knoxville, TN 37909.

AVALON HILL announces *Showbiz*, a simple, fast-paced game of logic. Players are put into the shoes of top Las Vegas theatrical agents, each required to predict future demand for a variety of show business acts. Also available is *Eldarad*,

The Lost City, the first in a new line of *RuneQuest* game supplements. Write to The Avalon Hill Game Company, 4517 Harford Road, Baltimore, MD 21214.

TWO ALTERNATIVE HISTORY games are now available from the publishers of *Command Magazine*: *Mississippi Banzai* and *NATO, Nukes and Nazis*. Each includes a four-color map, 300-400 die-cut counters, and a rules and alternative history pamphlet. Write to XTR Corp., PO Box 4017, San Luis Obispo, CA 93403.

REICH STAR is a science fiction roleplaying game by Creative Encounters. Imagine an Earth whose history was exactly the same as our own until World War II. Then imagine that the Third Reich had succeeded in its insane visions of global domination. What would the world be like? Includes rules, psychic abilities, alien races, starship construction, background, introductory adventure, and more. Write to Creative Encounters, 1616 W. Hudson Blvd., Gastonia, NC 28052.

Briefs describes gaming news and releases from a variety of publishers. Announcements should be sent in at least four months before a product is released, if possible. Write to Challenge Briefs, PO Box 1646, Bloomington, IL 61702-1646 USA.

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Knights of the Blue Feather

Dennis M. Myers

Original Palace Design by William Carey



The characters are just arriving on Anaxias after becoming heroes in Eta-Gu and have been sponsored in becoming Knights of the Blue Feather. They are under contract to deliver their passengers, for which they were to receive the *Shaula*, free and clear, as payment.

This adventure is meant to be a sequel to "Snowblind," but any qualified group which has shown unreserved bravery and gained the public spotlight as being heroes may be used. Keep in mind that after the ceremony their social standings become "B."

ARRIVAL AT ANAXIAS

Our heroes are greeted with enthusiasm as the news of their heroics has reached here ahead of them. It is at this point that the group's patrons will go their separate ways and will pass title of the *Shaula* to them. The press will keep them under constant surveillance their entire first day.

To avoid the press corps:

Difficult, Stealth, Int, 10 min (unskilled OK).

Referee: If the media learns of the attempt to avoid them, the task will become Formidable.

The PCs will be notified by special courier that they have been invited to stay in guest quarters at Margaret's palace. The ceremony initiating them into the Order of the Blue Feather has been scheduled for five days from the present date on Rheanon, the grand gravitic city. Travel arrangements can be made right in the starplex, or the PCs may opt to move their ship to the Rheanon starport. If so, they will have to wait one to three days for space to become available. This could be a good time to relax at Sabo Starplex or explore the rest of Anaxias.

SABO STARPLEX ON ANAXIAS

Sabo Starplex is the hub of all Margaret's official traffic, and as such is very busy. As the demands of such an increase in importance taxed the original ground facilities, new complexes have been constructed. The past four years have seen a boom in the construction industry. The new sprawling facilities are, however, far from perfect. Even the locals have trouble finding their way around. Nevertheless, unless the group shakes the media, there will always be someone around who can give them directions.

ANAXIAS SYSTEM SURVEY

Anaxias is a small world with a thin oxygen-nitrogen atmosphere. Slightly over 30% of the world's surface is covered by water.

While there is almost no seismic activity, the high temperature of the world makes outside living conditions unbearable without aid. Near the equatorial region lies a desert so hot that on a bad day water will boil. The poles are the site of all major population centers. Sabo and Dobson are in the north, while Kohinke and Pinnix are near the south pole. Baija is being built in the south and will eventually travel the entire surface as Rheanon does. Rheanon is currently only a few kilometers from Sabo.

Sabo: Anaxias has a population of slightly over 99 billion people. Four major city structures are located on the surface. Sabo, the largest, has a population of over 40 billion. Sabo Starplex is the premier trade center of the world. Coupled with the services of Sabo Orbital City, Sabo accounts for over 80% of the world's trade business. A reserved section near the starplex provides support and maintenance facilities for Margaret's palace. On the deeper levels, just above the engineering sections, is the Photon Maze. The maze is characterized by glittering holographic advertising and bright lighting displays. Anything and everything is for sale, legal or otherwise. Due to the sprawling nature in which these levels expanded and tunneled into the ground on all sides, there are far too many ways to get lost, especially if one doesn't wish to be found. Violent crime is common in the fringe areas, and newcomers are advised to stay near the center (where prices are, of course, much higher).

Dobson: Dobson has a population of only half that of Sabo. While most trade is conducted there, the vast majority of ore shipments leave through Dobson Downport. Dobson 2 (the orbital complex) holds the local naval shipbuilding contracts and is known for the high-quality products manufactured and delivered. Dobson is a mining town established so long ago that no accurate records have survived. The city was renamed after the pacification campaigns for the admiral who gave his life to save the city from invading forces. While the culture is primarily Vilani, Dobson has a large lower class of races from all over the Imperium who work as miners in its lower levels. Dobson's lower portion is rather dirty, and it gives the entire city a reputation for filth. The upper levels, however, are home to a very sophisticated cultural center.

Kohinke and Pinnix: Kohinke (20 billion) and Pinnix (10 billion) have only class B starports and share the Kohinke-Pinnix Orbital Facility (K-P Station). This is the only orbital facility with a bad reputation. A series of accidental decompressions of cargo and storage areas cost seven lives in 1119 and have cast serious doubt about the facility's construction. An investigation is currently underway. While these two cities are the

MEGATRAVELLER

smaller of the four major structures on the surface, they are by no means small. Both are relatively new and still expanding. Pinnix has a major annex under construction which is larger than the original city itself. Pinnixian industrial products are mostly shipped in system. Kohinke's expansion is mainly underground, as it is another mining town. It is much more modern than Dobson, so does not have Dobson's dust problems.

CITIES IN THE SKY

Anaxias' two gravitic cities are of some note.

Rheanon: The pride of Anaxias is the

MAJOR NPCs

Lubriid Sanches: Duchess of Breda, 588ACF, Age 46, 7 terms Cr650,000.

Leader-3, Persuasion-3, Artisan-3, Computer-3, Liason-2, Linguistics-2, Vacc Suit-2, Streetwise-1, History-1, Biology-1, Grav Veh-0, Animal Handling-0.

Travellers' Aid Society member.

Starport B, Small, Standard, Wet World, High Pop, Mod Law, Avg Stellar.

Vaclav Kursk: Ambassador, 345FFD, Age 46, 7 terms, Cr6000.

Liason-3, Persuasion-3, Linguistics-3, Grav Veh-2, Small Blade-2, Admin-1, Computer-1, History-1, Disguise-1, Artisan-1.

Traveller's Aid Society member.

Starport A, Small, Thin, Wet World, High Pop, High Law, Avg Stellar.

Lucky Whitney: Spacehand recruit, BAB779, Age 22, 1 term, Cr2000.

Gunnery-1, Vacc Suit-1, Snub Pistol-1, Carousing-1, Computer-0, Grav Veh-0.

Starport B, Small, Vacc, Desert World, High Pop, Mod Law, Avg Stellar.

Lt. Sir Tancred von Harrer: Special attaché, 887DAC, age 28, 1.5 terms, credits as needed.

Liason-3, Bribery-1, Forgery-1, Handgun-1, Interrogation-1, Streetwise-1, Vacc Suit-1, Computer-0, Grav Veh-0.

Starport A, Small, Thin, Wet World, High Pop, High Law, Avg Stellar.

gravitic city of Rheanon. With a population of four billion people, Rheanon is the largest free-floating structure in the sector. The city sports an operational class A starport and has an orbital facility called High Rheanon (Hi-Ree) to support its needs. The structure is made possible by the low gravity of Anaxias. Margaret's palace (the Ivory Tower) is commonly docked at the top of the city and serves as the cultural center of the sector.

Rheanon was built to be a manufacturing

center and can cut down overall transportation costs by moving to a position near sources of raw materials. Over the past decade the primary export of the city has become entertainment.

Baija: Although only partially completed, the new city of Baija is now fully capable of flight and has a population of over two billion. When completed, Baija will be able to support nearly eight billion. The majority of the population consists of construction workers and their families. For the time being, the starport has a class C rating and is leasing space on Dobson 2 for support.

OPTIONAL PCS

Domart Sernu: Navy commander, 7B7BA6, age 34, 4 terms, Cr80,000.

Nav-3, Sensor Ops-2, Commo-1, Computer-1, Cutlass-1, Electronics-1, Ship's Boat-1, Vacc Suit-1, Grav Veh-0.

4 low passages, 1 cutlass.

Starport A, Medium, Dense, Wet World, Hi Pop, Hi Law, Hi Stellar.

Tuun Gil Havaan: Merchant 4th officer, 774EC5, age 30, 3 terms, Cr20,000.

Engineering-3, Admin-1, Computer-1, Gravitics-1, Handgun-1, Medical-1, Vacc Suit-1, Grav Veh-0.

2 low passages, 1 snub pistol.

Starport A, Large, Standard, Wet World, Hi Pop, Hi Law, Hi Stellar.

Kibbs Harnil: Merchant 2nd officer, 877B87, age 30, 3 terms, Cr15,000.

Pilot-3, Grav Veh-2, Commo-1, Computer-1, Handgun-1, Medical-1, Sensor Ops-1, Streetwise-1.

3 low passages, 1 snub pistol.

Starport A, Medium, Dense, Wet World, Hi Pop, Hi Law, Hi Stellar.

Haddoc (Doc) Ware: Navy captain (medical corps) retired, 877FB9, age 54, 9 terms Cr45,000.

Medical-3, Computer-2, Carousing-2, Electronics-2, Forgery-2, Intrusion-2, Ship's Boat-2, Bribery-1, Cutlass-1, J.O.T.-1, Linguistics-1, Mechanical-1, Nav-1, Pilot-1, Revolver-1, Sensor Ops-1, Steward-1, Vacc Suit-1.

2 high passages, 3 low passages, 1 cutlass, 1 revolver.

Starport A, Asteroid, Vacuum, Hi Pop, Mod Law, Hi Stellar.

Referee's Note: Doc Ware was once caught forging a requisition for a ship's boat. He received a letter of reprimand but was not brought up on charges. This offense will not hinder his promotion to knight, but he should be aware of it as he will be questioned about it during the interview.

CULTURE AND CUSTOMS

Anaxians are a conservative people who require much convincing in order to accept change. Margaret had ruled Delphi since 1102 when her father, Anedon, died. Anedon was acting as regent after the death of Duchess Cassir in 1099. Her continued rule after the collapse of Imperial authority was welcomed as being no real change at all.

Anaxian government is broken into two branches: the powerful Republican Congress of the People, which is a collection of several councils, and the less powerful Executive Office of the Marquis of Anaxias. The two have operated with, until recently, relative harmony for several generations. The recent successor to the title has proven to be somewhat of a reformer (an impolite word among civil people). His drive to advance Anaxian technology is being fought tooth and nail by the R.C.P. Only the personal backing of Margaret has kept the congress from instigating a patent review.

The Anaxian society has several different factions competing on the political forum. Divisions are mostly on issues such as the gravitic cities and whether they are the cause of the steady decline of the quality of life in the overpopulated city structures on the surface. A prevalent anticyborg movement is also causing strife for the large population of citizens with artificial replacements. The most disruptive actions by any political division by far are the recent series of bombings by a group claiming loyalty to Lucan. "Lucan's Loyalists" have been proven to be an imported group, most likely sent by Lucan himself.

RAL RANTAN DELEGATION

While the group members are exploring their surroundings, they will hear several interesting rumors. Among these is mention of Ral Rantan treaty negotiations. A high-ranking Ral Rantan delegate is on Anaxias to negotiate a mutual aid pact between Margaret and the Ral Rantan Empire. The Solomani advance has the Rantans on the defensive, and they prefer the policies of Duchess Margaret to those of the Solomani racist governors in the Old Expanses. In

return for what they term "decisive military involvement" in the war against the Solomani, the Ral Rantan Empire wants to reclaim areas of the sector it lost to Imperial expansion in the last century. Negotiations hinge on an Imperial timetable for the withdrawal of Imperial forces on the two Hinterworlds systems occupied by Imperial forces and subsequently allowed to join the Imperium.

RHEANON, FANTASY CITY OF ANAXIAS

Upon arrival at Rheanon, the group will be shown to luxury accommodations within the Ivory Tower and will be given a grand tour of the palace. Later the group members will be given the schedule of events for the next few days. An entertainment company is recording a drama in one of the lower levels of the palace, and performances of specific scenes are on the schedule, as are a popular music concert tonight and a benefit banquet the next night. The banquet is to be the setting for the ceremony of entitlement. The first order of business is the committee interview, which is a requirement for advancement.

To pass the interview:

Simple, Liaison, Int, 10 min (safe).

Referee: If a mishap occurs the ceremony will be delayed one week while the problem is dealt with.

The following is a list of requirements which must be met before the honor of knighthood will be granted in the Order of the Blue Feather.

An individual:

- Must have the sponsorship of a sub-sector-level government.
- Must pass a committee review and an interview.
- Must have a background check completed.
- Must undergo a ceremony performed by Margaret. (In theory, this is a sector Ducal responsibility.)

Duke Armond of Eta-Gu is the group's sponsor. The committee interview is conducted by senior knights and will concentrate on the moral stance of the order. As long as group members understand the oath of the order and swear to uphold it to the best of their ability, the committee will pass them. This is the point at which any who do not wish to become knights may back out with honor.

The results of the background check will only pose a problem if any member of the party is wanted for criminal action in Delphi. As long as any past crimes have been paid for (by either fines or prison), the order will accept the offending person. However, such people will be reminded of the stiff penalty

for betraying the trust of the Order of the Blue Feather—death. As of this date only two knights have actually been executed (not counting those lost in Lucan's Imperium).

THE CEREMONY

The adventurers are treated as honored guests at a high-priced benefit dinner. Proceeds will be sent to aid victims of piracy throughout Margaret's stronghold. The highlight of the dinner is the ceremony at which Margaret pronounces them Knights of the Blue Feather and has them swear loyalty to truth, justice, and Imperial law (see page 25). They are all presented with the symbol of the order: a blue, black and blue sash which is worn from right shoulder to the waist at the left (or from upper right to lower left in a generally diagonal manner if this is not anatomically possible). She then presents the adventurers' papers of identification and entitlement.

After the ceremony, the dinner guests dance to the music of a live orchestra. The group will be introduced to several members of Margaret's family, including Count Blaine Tukera (Margaret's husband) and Lt. Sir Tancred von Harrer (Margaret's nephew). Also present are the Ral Rantan delegate and Lubriid Sanches, duchess of Breda. Margaret will dance with each male team member in turn, but will then prefer to sit on the dais. She is obviously pregnant.

Lt. Sir Tancred von Harrer has recently returned from an assignment in the Hinterworlds (which he refers to as the Hinters). The assignment was undertaken against the wishes of his Aunt Margaret (who disapproved due to its dangerous nature). He is quite friendly and willing to talk with the group freely. He will explain that, since the death of his mother in the same accident which killed Margaret's father Anedon in 1102, he and Margaret have been more like brother and sister, and she is overly protective of him. He will offer to help the group in any way he can, but may prove too busy to be of any real help (due to the military negotiations he is involved in). In his off time, however, Tancred is quite willing to show the new knights a good time. (Harrer, by the way, is a small town of about 40,000 in the southern hemisphere of Anaxias.)

BY POPULAR DEMAND

Near the end of the ball there is a commotion near the Ral Rantan delegation as the delegate's girlfriend collapses. Medical officers are on the scene quickly.

If the group's doctor is involved, he may perform the diagnosis and will be provided with a med scanner if he does not have one at hand.

To use a med scanner to perform a diagnosis:

Routine, Medical, Edu, 1 sec (unskilled OK).

Referee: A med scanner allows quick diagnosis of an injury. For diagnosis of a sickness, the time increment is reduced by one-half. Poisoning is treated as a sickness in this case.

The correct diagnosis is that the delegate's girlfriend has been poisoned! Unfortunately, the quick-acting poison is very difficult to counter, and the young lady dies just as the diagnosis is reached. She had been drinking from the delegate's cup.

The delegate took a sip from it only moments before and will begin to sicken rapidly. (The cup was carried by the delegate himself from his quarters as it was a gift from a close friend several years ago. He uses it often.) With the speedy actions of the medical personnel (possibly including some party members) an antidote should quickly arrive, and the delegate should survive.

The assassination attempt against the Ral Rantan delegate will prompt some bad publicity for the Vemene agents guarding him. The delegate, upon recovery, requests that the newly knighted heroes serve as his escort for the remainder of his visit (perhaps two or more weeks). Count Blaine will personally ask the group to do this, and will provide a Vemene backup for the group in the event of trouble.

THE DELEGATE AND HIS STAFF

Pentar Hontisk is a prime example of the

MEGATRAVELLER

stoic government of Ral Ranta. He is a stern negotiator whose attitude makes him most suitable for negotiating from a position of strength. In decades past, his talents were wasted upon the Imperium in general as his attitude was found humorous by Imperials who thought *themselves* superior. Regardless of this situation, over the years he has been able to achieve the title of *pentar*, meaning "highest delegate." With the collapse of the Imperium and the subsequent shifting of power, the pentar is no longer an object of humor, but rather a man to be reckoned with. It is to his extreme credit that he bears no ill will to those he negotiates with. However, his attitude of superiority and his subtle wit make him an interesting and formidable opponent.

The delegate's staff members are hand picked and well trained. He can trust them completely. They are:

Hoygani Syemtic: Hoygani Syemtic is the pentar's assistant and functions as his personal secretary. Hoygani schedules all meetings and coordinates the two special negotiators' activities. He also correlates their data and ensures that the negotiations

RAL RANTAN GLORY

Deep in the Long Night the region at the coreward end of the spinward border of the Hinterworlds was the fragmentary domain of warlords, each ruling only two or three worlds. During the frequent fighting which engulfed the region (due to the seeding of civilizations by the Solomani sleeper ships) several warlords would often ally with one another to lead combined fleets against a common threat, designating one of their number as supreme leader of the combined expedition. One such man was Rihala Ariden Llewsak of Nummen.

Llewsak was a very capable leader and could be counted on to bring victory after victory. As his popularity grew, so did his power. Finally at the end of a particularly successful campaign, he declined to return the combined fleets to the warlords and declared himself "warlord supreme." Five other warlords declared their loyalty, and to honor them Llewsak took their initials and formed the name "RANTA" for his empire. Through conquest he expanded his empire to encompass four subsectors and established it as the dominant power in the region. After his death his initials were added to the front of the name, and Ral Ranta was born.

The empire grew steadily for some time, but it lost momentum with each new warlord supreme, until about -94, when Ral Ranta captured its last new world. From then until approximately 130, the empire stagnated, becoming self-centered and divisive. Then several worlds in Glimmerdrift declared independence, and a civil war ensued which the Ral Rantans lost. Further fighting with Ranta's age-old enemy, the Twenty-One Worlds, on the spinward border, brought about a long period of decay that had slowly reduced Ral Ranta to the small, weakened state it was in only a few short years ago.

With the collapse of the Imperium and the raids by Solomani fleets, Ral Ranta has recently shown a spark of its former glory. Although the present Warlord Supreme is old and ineffective, several younger warlords are vying for power. The next leader may well be able to lead Ral Ranta to new glories.

stay within the bounds set by the pentar. While he is not an especially invigorating conversationalist, Hoygani has a tremendous wealth of historical knowledge, and to anyone with an interest in Ral Rantan history he can be a source of endless fascination.

Dumar Billings: Dumar Billings is the pentar's trade negotiations specialist. She comes from a long line of merchants and spent the first part of her life on a family-owned tramp trader ranging throughout the Ral Rantan Empire, the Hinterworlds, and the Glimmerdrift Reaches. At an early age she became interested in the bargaining and subtle negotiating of her father. Her decision to study interstellar trade law was encouraged by her parents, and she has become one of Ral Ranta's best-known diplomats. She drives a very hard bargain. In her spare time she enjoys spending time in the local starports mingling with merchants.

If the PCs follow Dumar, they will discover that she is meeting clandestinely with the same middle-aged man in a variety of places. Meetings generally take place in or near one of the starports. If the agent is caught he will refuse to divulge any information. If he is held for any length of time he will commit suicide. If Dumar is caught she will eventually confess to giving information to the Imperial Office of Hinterworlds Information, an agency run by Duke Maximillion of Adar from the Hinterworlds. She believes she is helping the Imperium and will not confess with a Ral Rantan present. (See Complications for the repercussions of her meetings.)

Fal Pennik: Military negotiations and draft mutual aid treaty are the responsibility of Fal Pennik, an old gentleman with a penchant for risk taking. His negotiating style is very demanding of his opponents, as he pushes to keep the other side off balance. In his spare time he will most likely be found in some back room involved in a game of chance.

Guards: The pentar and his staff are accompanied by nine Rantan guards. Wherever each member of the staff goes, at least one guard will follow, usually two. The guard leader ensures this and oversees all security matters. The leader also stays in close contact with the Vemene, keeping them informed of any security problems or unsatisfactory conditions.

THE HUNT IS ON

The identity of the assassin remains a mystery. The Vemene are convinced that it has to be a member of the delegation. The pentar will have none of this; his trust in his staff is final. The newly knighted heroes must find the person with a motive by interviewing or simply listening to the delegate's staff.

To discover a motive:
Difficult, Interview, Int, 2 hours (uncertain).

Referee: Failure at this task will give a wrong motive to the wrong staff member.

The PCs may think to search for the poison that was in the delegate's cup. If they ask, they will be provided with a TL16 chem sniffer.

To locate the poison using a chem sniffer:
Routine, Chemistry, Edu, 10 sec (uncertain).

Referee: If the location of the chemical is unknown the task becomes Difficult.

The Culprit: Hoygani Syemtic feels that he should have taken the pentar's place long ago. It is only because he uses anagathics that Hoygani still remains in a secondary position. In fact, Hoygani does most of the real work for the pentar, coordinating both the trade and military negotiations and correlating the data. He has a very good motive for killing the pentar—jealousy. Unfortunately, he bungled his first attempt. The poison was planted in the pentar's cup early, and Hoygani did not count on a young lady taking an interest in the old diplomat.

If he tries again, Hoygani will again use the same poison. He keeps it hidden in his quarters, which are legally off limits to Imperial authority.

COMPLICATIONS

To complicate matters, within the next few days a strike team of three highly trained individuals will try to bring a more violent end to the pentar's negotiations. It will lay in ambush for him during a visit to the commercial section of Rheanon. While the adventurers are initially the only ones between the pentar and certain death, the Vemene backup will intervene as soon as they are able (two to 12 minutes).

INSIDER

The strike team had inside information (see the description of Dumar Billings, above). This conclusion can be derived from the fact that the team knew exactly when and where to ambush the pentar's party. If any member of the team escapes the initial encounter, the remaining member(s) will try again.

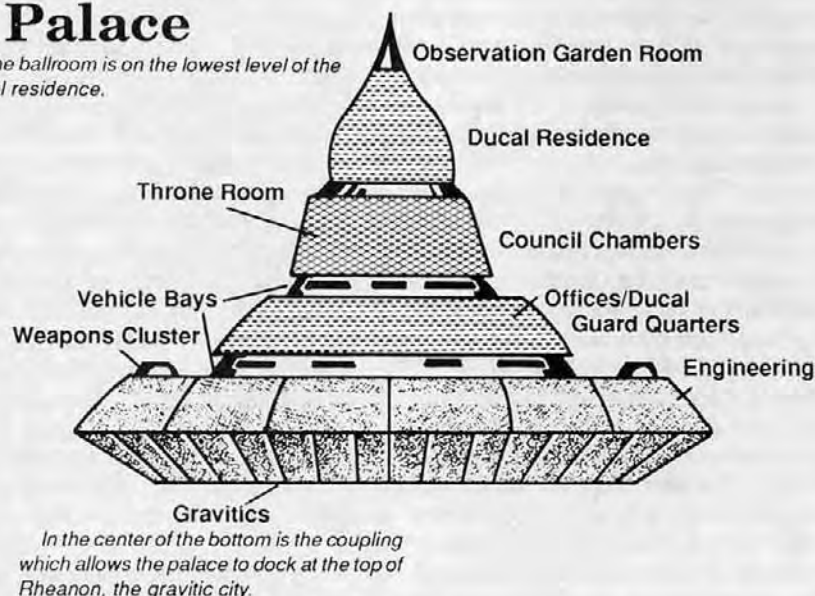
The strike team was actually sent by the duke of Adar, the Imperial occupied subsector in the Hinterworlds. Duke Maximillion Pollock considers himself to be the duke of the entire sector (as he is the only duke present) and has always ignored his actual superiors in the Old Expanses. It is for this reason alone that he rejected the treaty with the Solomani and declared for Margaret. He is aware of the nature of the current negotiations and will stop at nothing to retain absolute power over his two worlds. This can be found out only through the interrogation of captured strike team members.

MORE COMPLICATIONS

Lucan loyalists are plotting several terrorist attacks across Anaxias and will attempt to kidnap the pentar and hold him for ransom. They will attack the party in the

Margaret's Palace

The ballroom is on the lowest level of the ducal residence.



passages near the delegation's quarters. While they do not have the information needed for a truly successful operation (unless the party is very careless or the loyalists incredibly lucky), the loyalists' activities will keep the party members on their toes. The Vemene has some information on the loyalists and may occasionally be able to provide information concerning their activities (referees should use their discretion to piece out information if the PCs get stuck).

The Lucan loyalists are operating out of one of the vast open areas in the uncompleted sections of Baija. These areas are mainly open girders in a maze of support structure. Their hideout is buried deep in an area in which no construction is underway. None of the terrorists will reveal the location of their base, and they will commit suicide if pressed. The only clue the PCs will find to the location of their headquarters is a receipt found on one of them for clothing purchased on Baija.

HOSTAGE

If the loyalists/terrorists manage to take the pentar hostage, they will not harm him right away. Instead, they will demand the release of several prisoners loyal to Lucan (who have been jailed for violent crimes) and the cessation of all hostilities against Lucan.

They state that within 12 hours they will begin sending parts of the delegate to the government, starting with his right ear. The message transmitting the demands is untraceable.

If the 12-hour deadline is not met, the terrorists will indeed mail a bloody ear to the palace. Whether or not the ear actually belongs to the pentar is up to the referee. Another 12-hour deadline will be given after each one is missed until the delegate is rescued or killed. If the delegate is killed, Hoygani Syemtic will take charge of the negotiations (if he has not yet been brought up on attempted murder charges).

MEGATRAVELLER™

RETURN TO RAL RANTA

When it is time to conclude the adventure, the negotiations will come to an end. While the trade negotiations favor Margaret, the military agreement sets a time frame of three years in which to complete the reintegration of Adar/Hinterworlds (0104) and Venad/Hinterworlds (0402) into Ral Ranta. (Venad came under Imperial jurisdiction as recently as 1098, while Adar has been under Imperial control since 1084.) In return, Ral Ranta will begin raiding behind Solomani lines in the Old Expanses to weaken actions at the front.

Ral Ranta will also claim any worlds

ORDER OF THE BLUE FEATHER

The following are the benefits and entitlements granted a Knight of the Blue Feather (certain conditions and further explanation are given below):

- TAS membership.
- Fifty-percent ship subsidy (no down payment) for any ship.
- One-time cash gift of up to $KCr[2D6+(DMs)\times 100]$.
- Free fuel at any military base under Margaret's influence.
- The popular support of billions across the Imperium.
- A death warrant issued by Lucan's Imperium.
- Free license to privateer against Solomani forces.
- Priority for any military surplus items and captured items up for sale or put into storage (items for storage will only be leased).
- Official blue/black/blue sash for formal occasions.
- Full-sized certificate of authenticity of rank and order membership.
- Pocket-sized version of above with embedded holocrystal documentation.

The ship subsidy allows the forgoing of a down payment and reduces the monthly payments by 50% on any new ship. It also allows for the purchase of ships that would ordinarily only be available to the military.

DMs for the cash bonus are +1 if prior Social Standing was 4 or below, -1 if above 9.

Military bases claiming no specific allegiance may also provide free fuel.

To obtain free fuel beyond Margaret's stronghold:

Difficult, Persuasion, Liaison, 10 min.

Referee: A mishap may lead to military action by those loyal to an opposing faction.

Lucan has issued a death warrant against all members of the Order of the Blue Feather. Subsequent warrants are issued in each new member's name as the Imperial government becomes aware of it.

The privateering license is optional and allows the bearer to trade goods obtained in raiding activity without papers of ownership. Military surplus is at the moment nonexistent, and all assets captured from the enemy are used against that same enemy.

The sash is worn from the upper right shoulder to the left side of the waist and is five centimeters wide and colored in three bands: blue, black and blue. While the sash is meant to be worn for formal occasions, it can be worn for any occasion where dressing up is appropriate. It is also common for knights who engage in combat to paint the sash on their armor.

The large certificate is suitable for framing, measuring 30 by 20 centimeters, while the smaller version is intended be presented with common identification.

Oath

In order to preserve and reestablish the best of all possible societies in modern times, I hereby pledge to use all resources given to my disposal in a manner so as to better or salvage the situation of citizens of the Imperium against all foes—political, military, biological or economical. I pledge my complete loyalty to the ideals established by Cleon the First when he founded the Third Imperium, and represented by Arbellatra's regency after the civil war. In accordance with these high principles, I swear to dedicate my life to deeds dictated by my conscience which can only be construed as the right thing to have done. I further pledge to give all due reasonable aid to any knight of this order in the accomplishment of their goals whenever possible.

Shaula

CraftID: Far Trader, Type MF, TL 15, MCrr77.171
Hull: 180/450, Disp=200, Config=1SL, Armor=50G, Unloaded=2073 tons, Loaded=3207 tons
Power: 1/2, Fusion=4500Mw, Duration=15/45
Loco: 14/28 Maneuver=3, 7/14, Jump=3, NOE=90 kph, Cruise=270 kph, Top=360 kph, Agility=4
Commo: Radio=System
Sensors: PassiveEMS=Interstellar, ActiveEMS=FarOrbit, ActObjScan=Routine, ActObjPin=Routine, PasEngScan=Routine
Off: BeamLaser=x05
 Batt 2
 Bear 2
Def: DefDM=+6
Control: Computer=1bisx3, Panel=holodynamic linkx440, Special=heads upx3, Environ=basic environment, basic life-support, extended life-support, grav plates, inertial compensator
Accom: Crew=6(Bridge=2, Engineer=1, Gunnery=2, Steward/Medical=1), Staterooms=9, SubCraft=air/raft
Other: Cargo=586 kliters, Fuel=546.48 kliters, Purification Plant, Scoops, ObjSize=Average, EMLevel=Moderate

captured in the sector as its own.

When the negotiations are complete, what remains of the Ral Rantan delegation will depart for Ral Ranta. If the party has been somewhat successful, it will be invited to visit some time in the future. If the PCs have been extremely successful in protecting the pentar and locating his assailant (and maybe even rescued him from the terrorists), the PCs will be presented a medal called the Honor of the Warlord Supreme. The Honor of the Warlord Supreme of Ral Ranta is a very high award for a Ral Rantan, and the PCs will be the only living Imperials to receive it. The last Imperial awarded this honor was Margaret's mother, Cassir, in 1089. The PCs may wear the honor along with any other medals they may have (or will receive) on the sash of the Order of the Blue Feather.

This adventure is a sequel to "Snowblind" by Dennis M. Myers, published in Challenge 45.

THE ULTIMATE MEGA TRAVELLER™ ADVENTURE!

Part 4

BY: PHIL MORRISSE!



WHAT
OTHER TYPES
OF NIFTY
GIMMICKS
COULD GAME
FANS WANT?
HOW ABOUT...



BUT...
LET'S BE
HONEST!
WHAT DO
GAMERS
REALLY
WANT?



TRAVELLER *News Service*

Mora/Spinward Marches (3124 AA99AC7-F)

Date: 252-1120

¶Archduke Norris today officially named Mora as the capital world of the provisional government of the Domain of Deneb.

¶"From this beautiful world, we will together be able to build outward, beyond our current borders, toward the full Imperium as we once knew it," Norris said in prepared remarks.

¶Mora, already the capital of the sector and subsector, is expected to undergo a healthy increase in employment and construction to keep up with its new responsibilities.

¶The central location of Mora within the Domain of Deneb was seen by analysts as a principal reason for the move.

¶The duchess of Delphine was represented at the ceremonies by her grandniece, Elane, next in line to rule Mora itself.

Hexos/Spinward Marches (2828 B53406R-8)

Date: 019-1121

¶Bulletin: Red Zone Declared!

¶Imperial authorities under Archduke Norris today reported the death of the last native human inhabitant of Hexos, devastated by plague.

¶Claims that Aslan *ihatei* used biological warfare to depopulate the world have not been disproven. "Whatever it is that's killing these people, Aslan appear to be immune," said Dr. Julia Kartinian, a scientist investigating the disease.

¶TAS advises all travellers that Hexos is henceforth classified for travel as a Red Zone, with all contact interdicted.

Capital/Core (2118 A586A98-F)

Date: 026-1121

¶Naval spokesmen for Emperor Lucan have announced continued success in their rimward campaigns but refuse to release details in an effort to reduce the ability of the Solomani to plan strategically.

¶"The devastation we are dealing these rebels is so extensive that the Solomani Navy has recently been unable to report back the whereabouts of parts of its fleet. Rebel leaders don't know where their ships are, so we see no need to help them out. What we can say is that many of those ships won't ever report back."

¶An anonymous source close to Emperor Lucan said that the recent "superweapons speech" does relate to these naval successes. "The emperor would not have put his technical staff on the spot unless he knew that real breakthroughs were being made. What our scientists have accomplished is, in a word, startling. The emperor expects a complete cessation of hostilities as soon as his ultimatum is delivered to the leaders of the various rebellion factions."

Anaxias/Delphi (1724 A253A85-D)

Date: 027-1121

¶Spokesmen for Duchess Margaret still refuse to confirm or deny recent allegations that one or both of her children are the direct descendants of the late Emperor Strephon.

¶Duchess Margaret's personal physician claimed shortly after the birth that the twins were the result of artificial insemination and that the duchess would make a claim for her daughter's ascension to the throne.

¶Dr. Setree went into hiding shortly thereafter, but not before changing his story. "Julia Iphegenia Cassir Tukera is the daughter of Duchess Margaret and Count Blaine Tukera, but Paulo Trulla Strephon Tukera is the son of Duchess Margaret and Emperor Strephon, the fruit of a prefertilized egg that I implanted myself in a short and simple operation. The DNA data that I have on file can verify this fact whenever the duchess allows me to release the information."

Muan Gwi/Solomani Rim (1717 A456A86-F)

Date: 056-1121

¶Sociologists on this world are becoming more and more concerned over the shortage of *mwob*, a spice used in cooking by many Vegans.

¶The spice, sweet and nutty with camphor-like overtones, is gathered annually by large hunting parties who sweep across Muan Gwi's southernmost desert hunting a small animal called the *rurge*. Last year's hunt was the most successful in years, with double the number of animals caught.

¶Zoologists believe that this year's shortage is a natural occurrence, related to last year's plenitude, but do not attribute it to overhunting.

¶*Mwob* does not preserve well, losing most of its flavor within a year.

¶The shortage of the spice could have long-term effects on Vegan culture, as some *tuhuir*, or cultural groups, are less dependent on the spice in their cuisines. "With *mwob* largely unavailable, many Vegans in their years of choice are avoiding certain *tuhuir*s. Those cultural groups that use *mwob* are shrinking, while those that do not are seeing significant growth. Since about half of all Vegans stay with the *tuhuir* of their parents, this means that this change in numbers could last for many generations," said one observer.

Two Small Steps

Charles E. Gannon

Not all spaceflight involves chasing around a solar system at mind-boggling speed. In fact, for TL8 (and less) systems, travel between safe havens can involve weeks—even months—of low-G travel. But even when prospected slowly, space has riches to offer.

The PCs are waiting for passage off Bucolia (1619 Darvis/Hinters) when a local newscast catches their attention. Apparently, a mercenary group landed on-planet yesterday, purportedly in the hire of a local subsidiary of Sablewool, Inc., a Nullian League corporation with a questionable past.

This morning, the mercs stormed the government Space Operations Training Facility just outside the capital city of Tyrohome. Accusations fly fast and thick on the local news channels. Sablewool spokespeople claim that one of their executives was kidnapped and is being held at the Space Ops Center—hence, their attack. Bucolia's official statements carry the genuine shock of surprise. More cynical newscasters suggest that this is just the beginning of a planned takeover of Bucolia by League-controlled forces. One anchorwoman even goes so far as to suggest the next likely target: the recently expanded Launch Support Facility just outside of the Bucol Downport berthing complex (known as "Buckledown" to the locals).

Hours later, the PCs' group is contacted by a local security official who explains that Bucolia's government is highly interested in hiring them to solve two problems that have been caused by the mercenary attack.

The first—and most obvious—problem is that of security. While Bucolia has a small military, most of its forces are tied up with surrounding the Sablewool subsidiary. The rest of the planet's strength is providing local security to the starport and the capitol. Bucolia still has a few TL7 infantry platoons with which to defend the Launch Support Facility, but they lack officers with command experience. His open-ended statement suggests a familiarity with the less than pacifistic background of some of the player characters.

The second problem is even more difficult—and touchy. It seems that the unfathomable attack on the Space Operations Training Facility was not so incomprehensible after all. Of the nine senior spaceflight pilots in direct Bucolian service, four were killed in the attack, and two were wounded. The remaining three cannot be risked any further and have been hidden. Word has circulated, however, that some people at the starport have seen the PCs' resumes—which indicate some piloting and navigational skills. Once again, the group perceives the open-ended statement to be an invitation to employment.

The cash reward is approximately Cr50,000 per team member, with a Cr50,000 group bonus for "complete success."

If the PCs bite at the bait, their contact will fill in the rest of the details. The first of Bucolia's new *Far Atlas* space shuttles is ready to launch any day. The authorities have been planning the launch for four months, taking no chances. Their secret was that the first payload was to be three orbital defense satellites with ion stationkeeping systems. These satellites boast a factor 1, TL7 beam laser battery, a huge solar array, and almost a tonne of batteries. They can be aimed at spaceside invaders, or retargeted planetside—to destroy any unfriendly elements that might manage

to land. Apparently the Nullian League got wind of Bucolia's plans and conspired to stop them before they could come to fruition.

Dirtside Duties

The team members designated for ground defense of the Launch Support Facility will have their hands full. The can requisition any number of civilian internal combustion vehicles (if the referee does not feel like designing one, the TL5 Letra ground car from Digest Group's *101 Vehicles* is recommended).

The available troops are in three 32-man platoons. The troopers in each platoon are regulars organized into four squads of eight. Each squad is armed with six 5mm assault rifles, one submachinegun, and one autorifle. Two squads also have access to light machineguns, and one squad has access to a TL7 6cm recoilless rifle. The troopers are unarmored.

The opposing mercs are equipped to TL8+ standards. While there are only 40 of them, they are veterans organized into four squads of 10. Each squad is equipped with six 7mm assault rifles, one light assault gun, one TL8 laser carbine, and two TL8 RAM grenade launchers. There are 20 personal communicators in the group, as well as plenty of hand grenades (mostly TL7 high-explosives and incendiaries. All troops are in flak armor, except for the laser carbine trooper (squad NCO), who is outfitted in cloth armor.

And yes, the mercs will attack the launch facility. Three squads will make their attack approach in APCs (the TL8 Sepoy APC from Digest Group's *101 Vehicles* is recommended), while the last squad will come roaring onto the facility in three light recon cars (the TL8 Inquiry recon ATV from *101 Vehicles* is suggested). The mercenaries know the layout of the facility, but if the player characters have been smart enough to build in some changes and traps, they could manage to turn the tide by being smarter—even though they are outgunned.

Spaceside Special Operations

The Sablewool mercenaries will attack on the fourth day that the players are at the facility.

Unfortunately, that's the same morning that the Bucolian government has decided to launch the *Far Atlas*—with the team members as pilots. The government moved the launch date up as early as it could in order to move quickly and yet complete preparations for a controlled launch.

The fighting breaks out just as the launch gantry's restraining booms are falling away, with maybe 30 seconds left until launch. Some enemy units are taking potshots at the shuttle, but they're also staying well back; the liftoff exhaust of the booster rockets is the most dangerous weapon on the facility.

The player characters will have to conduct task rolls for a controlled launch, an in-atmosphere jettison of the reusable solid rockets, then an LPO jettison of the first satellite (no reentry; this is merely orbital deployment).

However, before the team members can jettison the second of

the three satellites, they get a frantic call from Buckledown to take evasive action. A killer satellite—apparently seeded by Sablewool—has a “shotgunned” a cloud of gravel in the shuttle’s direction, and other satellites are closing in using stationkeeping thrusters.

The referee should generate a number of hair’s-breadth escape tasks as the *Far Atlas* is compelled to dodge its attackers. Treat each attacking satellite as a factor-1 sandcaster battery.

After the attack, the *Far Atlas* must move to SPO in order to dodge a second wave of attacking satellites. It is from this position that it must deploy the last two satellites to an LPO orbit. Treat this task as identical to an SPO jettison task, without a reentry component.

Finally, the *Far Atlas* can return home to a landing at Buckledown field. Whatever damage she sustained in the attack may make her landing tasks somewhat more difficult, however.

Far Atlas Three Stages

CraftID: Frontier Shuttle, ZY, TL7, MCr50.47

Hull: 90/225, Disp=100, Config=1AF, Arm=40, Unloaded=809.35, Loaded=1270.35

Power: 1/2, Nuclear=10Mw, Duration=14/42

Loco: 6/13, HiPrfRkt=3.14/4000 Tt, Duration=3 min, NOE=none, Cruise=1674 kph, Top=2232 kph

Commo: Radio=Planetary

Sensors: AW Radar=Continent, Adv IR, Light Amp, Radiation Sensor, Medium Robot Arm, Video Recorder, ActObjScn=Difficult, ActObjPin=Difficult

Off: None

Def: None

Control: Computer=1x3, Panel=electronic, Environ=basic environment, basic life-support, extended life-support

Accom: 2x2, (Bridge=2, Engine=2), 4 bunks

Other: Cargo=335 KI, Fuel(Cryo)=120 KI, ObjSz=Avg, EmLvl=faint, Multistage=section 1 of the *Far Atlas*.

The *Far Atlas* frontier shuttle is highly attractive to many TL7 worlds that don’t have the money to invest in expensive launch support facilities. As part of the three-stage *Far Atlas* total shuttle vehicle, it is prized for its ability to achieve LPO even if lifting from a Size 10 planet with a Dense atmosphere and carrying a 5x density cargo. The 335-kiloliter cargo bay is a snug but sure fit for station or hull modules of 25-ton displacement, making the *Far Atlas* a logical “startup kit” for space-hungry planets. One hull (or “stage”) of this design is used in the full *Far Atlas* multistage configuration.

CraftID: Unmanned Transport, ZT, TL7, MCr92.79

Hull: 81/202, Disp=90, Config=3AF, Arm=40, Unloaded=787, Loaded=1259

Power: None

Loco: 14/28, HiPrfRkt=6.8/8580 Tt, Duration=9 min, NOE=none, Cruise=3096 kph, Top=4128 kph

Commo: None

Sensors: None

Off: None

Def: None

Control: Remote Control=3xFarOrb Radio

Accom: None (unmanned)

Other: Cargo=195KI, Fuel=220 KI, ObjSz=avg, EmLvl=faint, Multistage=section 3 of *Far Atlas*. Reuseable.

The TL7 “bootstrap” cryorocket exemplifies unmanned lifters of this era and—with or without the total *Far Atlas* shuttle system—is a common sight in backwaters everywhere. Capable of extraordinary boost and good operational duration, the Bootstrap can perform any number of tasks on its own, including delivering payloads to LPO or SPO, as well as carrying offensive payloads. It is simple and rugged, and a 10-displacement ton additional cargo

module is available which mounts on top of it, bringing its payload capacity to 330. Two of these stages are used in the full *Far Atlas* multistage configuration.

MEGATRAVELLER™

CraftID: Tanker Unpowered, TU, TL7, MCr.43

Hull: 24/60 Disp=31.79, Config=1SL, Arm=8, Unloaded=16.1, Loaded=142.1

Power: None

Loco: None

Commo: None

Sensors: None

Off: None

Def: None

Control: None

Accom: None

Other: Cargo=0 KI, Fuel=360 KI, ObjSz=avg, EmLvl=faint, Multistage=section 2 of complete *Far Atlas* vehicle, LOP disposable.

This fuel tank is carried underneath the *Far Atlas* and provides fuel for the *Far Atlas* during its maximum nine-minute, Bootstrap-assisted primary launch phase. The 360 kiloliters of fuel will be completely consumed by the *Far Atlas* in those nine minutes (assuming full thrust is being used). At that point, the tank is usually jettisoned, although it may be released into LPO orbit as a storage area. One of these stages is included in the full *Far Atlas* multistage configuration.

Far Atlas Multistage Configuration

CraftID: Frontier Transport, ZT, TL7, MCr236.488

Hull: 276/689, Disp=261.79, Config=1&3SL/AF, Arm=40&8, Unloaded=2399.45, Loaded=3930.45

Loco: 34/69, HiPrfRkt=5.38/21160 Tt, Duration=9 min, NOE=none, Cruise=2982 kph, Top=3976 kph

Other: Cargo=725 KI, Fuel=920 KI, ObjSz=avg, EmLvl=faint, Multistage=three-stage performance.

This rating assumes that the two Bootstrap hulls and the *Far Atlas* herself are boosting simultaneously at full thrust. G performance and duration can be dramatically altered if this is changed. Remember, the G rating is for vacuum. You must subtract one G from the rating to determine the *Far Atlas*’ actual atmospheric launch Gs (maximum). Furthermore, since not all the hull configurations are identical (the Bootstrap is a configuration 3), the in-atmosphere speed is reduced by 5%. All tasks are resolved with a DM of -2 while the Bootstraps are attached. However, the moment the two Bootstrap stages are jettisoned, the penalties are removed.

Given the large, dense atmosphere worlds as a market, this extra power and lifting capacity is usually seen as a boon. Smaller planets like to trim back the thrust (or burn duration) and get to LPO or SPO with fuel and maneuver to spare. It makes for a versatile design. The stage 2 fuel tank is usually dropped at the same time as the two Bootstrap rockets. Therefore, stage 1 performance is as per the *Far Atlas* listing.

HIGH ON ION

While waiting for transit out of the Harovine system into Harov (0520, Harovine, tertiary companion in trinary system Harov: Cimeon/Hinters), you are approached by Capt. Ludmilla D’Turu for help in a strange matter.

Captain D’Turu is the owner of an old TL7 ion drive bucket known

as the *Viva Harovina*. Five days ago, while prospecting in the surrounding planetoid belt, she came upon an old ion thruster module, moored in the lee of a 50-ton rock. According to the serial numbers, it had been there for 50 years. Apparently, it was the former possession of an eccentric and suspicious old crumbmudgeon known as One Eye Gibault—both a legendary prospector and a bogeyman for the local children. Gibault being long dead, the find was pronounced by the Harovina authorities as legal salvage, and D'Turu promptly placed one of her ID beacons on it. The module has been virtually untouched by micrometeoroid showers and is still in perfect working condition. D'Turu has no intentions of selling it; with a little refurbishment, she can add the unit to her modular frame vessel and almost double its overall G rating.

Unfortunately, 12 hours ago, the ID beacon she had emplaced on the ion module went dead.

Since then, radar sweeps have shown the area to be empty: no ship, no module, no trace. Nothing but rocks. Capt. D'Turu originally came back to Harovina Big Rock (the main base and colony you're currently on) to get salvage assistants. But now she thinks some people with experience in "security matters" might be a prudent addition.

If the player characters take the job, they'll find their pay to be rather interesting (and a little different). D'Turu will see to it that they get free transport to the main system (Harov) and that they'll get a cargo to speculate with as well: six tons of thorium (radioactive ore) and two tons of precious metals.

Ghosts on the Radar, Ghosts on the Radio

D'Turu will set course for the last known position of her salvage. Upon learning that some of the team members have piloting experience, she will suggest that they do some maneuvering in the belt themselves and get familiar with the feel of the ship.

"You never know what knowledge might come in handy," she says. A couple of minor maneuvering task rolls would be in order for the PCs here.

Upon arriving at the site, the characters will have to conduct a large number of sensor sweeps. The one clue that's present is small and should not be announced as *being* a clue. Someone will simply note an unusually orderly micrometeoroid shower transecting the former position of the ion module. The meteoroids all have a mass of approximately one kilogram and are laid out in an almost straight line, travelling at the same velocity. Let the characters chew on this for awhile. If they don't guess the shower's significance, then have D'Turu start backtracking the meteoroid shower on a hunch.

While the group is pursuing the hunch, a number of garbled radio messages will be picked up, apparently from old Gibault himself. The messages are cryptic, mad, and more than a little threatening. After awhile they fade, occasionally resuming as insane, ghostly laughter.

It will take a number of sensor sweeps to locate the source of both the radio messages and the meteoroid shower. The team members finally isolate a small (800-tonne) asteroid (a mere ghost on the screens) that is spewing out a steady stream of one-kilogram rocks—the sure sign of a mass driver at work.

Asteroidal Antics

Chasing this fairly slow (.001 G) fugitive is difficult—not because it's fast (it isn't) but because its "pilot" knows the belt so well and is heading directly *into* its rotational flow. Essentially, the characters have to give chase by travelling the wrong way on a one-way street. A number of difficult Piloting tasks should be made in order to close in on the asteroid.

When the team members finally disembark, they will find that the ion module is not immediately visible; it has been concealed on the asteroid's shady side. If they are incautious—and undiplomatic—

they may encounter decided (if lunatic) resistance from none other than Two Eye Gibault. Two Eye is both less sane and certainly less skilled than his father, One Eye—who didn't deign to leave his son anything except a bad reputation.

Two Eye, at last feeling he has committed an act which will gain him both notoriety and wealth, will use his snub pistol freely to defend the ion module, his ticket to infamy and fortune (Two Eye has Handgun-3). His one accomplice, a nephew by the name of Delvid Tork, is a scared and eminently rational 17-year-old who wants to get off this rock and back home, away from his wild-eyed uncle.

With the proper skills—Carousing, Persuasion, and/or Liaison—Two Eye can be talked out of his "mad hatter" plans. Otherwise, the group will face a prolonged gun battle with a madman.

Harova-Class Slow Barge, Modular Hull

CraftID: Barge Module (Main Hull), XW, TL7, MCr8.86
Hull: 17/42 Disp=19, Config=OM, Arm=40, Unloaded=108.89, Loaded=110.69
Power: 1/2, Battery=1.2Mw, Duration=1 hour
Loco: None
Commo: Radio=System
Sensors: Radar=Planetary, Headlights=4, Passive IR, Light Amp, Magnetic Sensor, Radiation Sensor, Heavy Robot Arm, Medium Robot Arm, Video Recorder, ActObjScn=Difficult, ActObjPin=Difficult
Off: None
Def: None
Control: Computer=0x3, Panel=electronic, Environ=basic environment, basic life-support, extended life-support
Accom: 2x2, (2 bridge, 1 mechanical, 1 engineer), 2 state-rooms (double occupancy)
Other: Cargo=1.8 KI, Fuel=0 KI, ObjSz=avg, EmLvl=faint

The main hull for the modular slow barge class *Harova*, this is a prime example of the minimal designs necessitated by a low tech level. For instance, although the total hull's main radar is mounted on this main hull, it depends upon other hulls for enough power to run it. Similarly, while the batteries could be extended to provide minimal life-support for some time, they are present primarily as an emergency measure and to facilitate operations if the main engineering hull is detached or being serviced.

CraftID: Barge Module (Engineering Hull), XW TL, MCr4.57
Hull: 17/42, Disp=19, Config=0M, Arm=40, Unloaded=258.71, Loaded=581.34
Power: 1/2, Nuclear=10Mw, Duration=50/150
Loco 1: 6/12, Ion=.0005/.3 Tt, Duration=50/150, NOE=none, Cruise=0 kph, Top=0 kph
Loco 2: 1/2, HiPrfRkt=.234/135.5 Tt, Duration=40 min, NOE=none, Cruise=0 kph, Top=0 kph
Commo: None
Sensors: None
Off: None
Def: None
Control: Panel=electronic, Environ=none
Accom: None
Other: Cargo=1 KI, RadFuel=24 KI, IonFuel=.72 KI, CryoFuel=63 KI, ObjSz=avg, EmLvl=faint

Ion drives do not get you there fast, but they get you there. Note the tremendous mass increase caused by the nuclear fuel. When fuel mass drops, performance picks up to approximately .001 G with the ion drives. The rockets are used for fast transit needs, as well as any delicate terminal approach maneuvering.

This hull does not offer a shirtsleeve environment; all work must be conducted in suits.

CraftID: Barge Module (Auxiliary Thrust Hull), XW, TL7, MCr4.485
Hull: 17/42 Disp=19, Config=0M, Arm=40, Unloaded=277.37, Loaded=363.2
Power: 1/2, Nuclear=5Mw, Duration=20/60
Loco 1: 10/20, Ion=.0014/.5 Tt, Duration=50 days, NOE=none, Cruise=0 kph, Top=0 kph
Loco 2: 1/2, HiPrfRkt=.242/87.75 Tt, Duration=40 min, NOE=none, Cruise=0 kph, Top=0 kph
Commo: None
Sensors: None
Off: None
Def: None
Control: Panel=Electronic, Environ=none
Accom: None
Other: Cargo=0 KI, RadFuel=5.76 KI, IonFuel=1.8 KI, CryoFuel=36 KI, ObjSz=avg, EmLvl=faint

Similar to the engineering hull in many respects. Note that when either hull uses its rockets, the main hull uses the 2% of Tt megawatts generated to top off its batteries.

CraftID: Barge Module (Mission Hull), XW, TL7, MCr9.77
Hull: 17/42, Disp=19, Config=5MSL, Arm=40, Unloaded=192.45, Loaded=266.45
Power: 1/2, Nuclear=5Mw, Duration=20/60
Loco: 1/2, HiPrfRkt=.878/234 Tt, Duration=16 min, NOE=0 kph, Cruise=0 kph, Top=0 kph
Commo: Radio=FarOrb
Sensors: AW Radar=Continental, Headlights=4, Passive IR, Light Amp, EnvSnsr, Magnetic Sensor, Radiation Sensor, Heavy Robot Arm=2, Light Robot Arm=2, Video Recorder
Off: 1 turret (weapons dismantled)
Def: None
Control: Computer=0x3, Panel=electronic, Environ=basic environment, basic life-support, extended life-support
Accom: 1x3 (2 Bridge, 1 Engineer), 3 bunks
Other: Cargo=.5 KI, RadFuel=4.8 KI, CryoFuel=40 KI, ObjSz=avg, EmLvl=faint

Designed as an away boat, this craft can be used to intercept faster objects and facilitate prospecting. It can also be used to land on and launch from planets (as long as most of its nuclear fuel is removed beforehand). It serves as an additional living module (adds three berths to the four in the main hull) and an emergency lifeboat.

CraftID: Barge Module (Cargo Hull), XW, TL7, MCr1.4
Hull: 17/42, Disp=19, Config=0M, Arm=40, Unloaded=85.88, Loaded=319.88
Power: None
Loco: None
Commo: None
Sensors: None
Off: None
Def: None
Control: Panel=electronic, Environ=basic environment, basic life-support, extended life-support
Accom: None (or a 16-bunk module with solar power station, for passengers or work crews)
Other: Cargo=234 KI, Fuel=0 KI, ObjSz=avg, EmLvl=faint

This module is usually used to haul ore, but the designers opted to put in life-support to make it an emergency shelter/shirtsleeve environment (given the amount of cargo handling done). This also makes it possible to put in a very inexpensive passenger module. Such modules are often

left behind on larger asteroids, etc., while work crews prospect the rock.

They have also been used as the first modules of space stations and as fuel depot tanks.

CraftID: Modular Frame, VX, TL7, MCr.193
Hull: 4/11, Disp=5, Config=0M, Arm=40, Unloaded=29.04
Power: None
Loco: None
Commo: None
Sensors: None
Off: None
Def: None
Control: None
Accom: None
Other: Cargo=0 KI, Fuel=0 KI, ObjSz=sml, EmLvl=faint

This is the spine of the *Harova*-class modular barge—a conglomeration of booms, struts, and carriages that allows up to 95 displacement tons of hulls to be clipped together. This means that five of the modular hulls above are the maximum load (5x19=95; 95+5=100), since the frame must represent at least 5% of the total hull displacement. The normal *Harova* configuration is one main hull, one engineering hull, one thrust hull, one mission hull, and one cargo hull. The following total hull design reflects this configuration.

Full Harova Modular Configuration

CraftID: Slow Barge (modular), WW, TL7, MCr29.278
Hull: 90/225 Disp=100, Config=0M, Arm=40, Unloaded=952.43, Loaded=1670.6
Power: 3/6, Nuclear=20/10 Mw, Duration=(20/60)/(50/150) 1/2, Battery=1.2Mw, Duration=1 hour
Loco 1: 16/32, Ion=.0005/.8 Tt, Duration=50/150 (after 20/60 days, thrust reduces to 37.5% of max due to exhaustion of nuclear fuel)
Loco 2: 3/6, HiPrfRkt=.2/338.8 Tt, Duration=40 min, NOE=none, Cruise=0 kph, Top=0 kph
Commo: See total of listed modules
Sensors: See total of listed modules
Off: 1 turret (weapons dismantled)
Def: None
Control: Assess on individual module basis
Accom: 1x3, 1x4 (4 bridge, 3 engineer)
Other: Cargo=237.3 KI, RadFuel=34.56 KI, IonFuel=2.52 KI, CryoFuel=139 KI, ObjSz=avg, EmLvl=faint

As with many lower-tech craft, the *Harova's* performance can be altered to suit specific needs. The above profile assumes full output (with the mission hull lowering its rocket thrust to give it a duration of 40 minutes, thereby matching it to the other on-board cryorockets). The *Harova* was originally a first-line prospecting and cargo ship. Her nuclear power plants allowed her to make deep system runs, since she was not dependent upon solar proximity for a good level of power (many early ion ships use solar panels). With extra radioactives in her cargo bay, she can extend her mission duration considerably—which was how *Harov* first conquered the challenge of intrastellar settlement and resource exploitation. Ω

For more information to use with these adventures, see "One Small Step" by Charles E. Gannon in *Challenge 45*.

MEGATRAVELLER™

BAKER'S DOZEN

It seems like an easy way to pay off our debts—or is it?



***M**aybe we shouldn't have been so surprised.*

It had seemed like an easy—if somewhat illegal—way to pay our debts and actually come out a few thousand ahead. All the friendly stranger wanted was for us to copy some data files out of the local computer net. She even provided the entry codes and passwords to get past the rudimentary security systems on this TL9 garden backwater (Angerhelm, Bruia/Hinters).

We really should have known better.

No sooner had we handed over the data and gotten the key to the bank lockbox holding our payoff than the transaction was rudely interrupted by a half-dozen law enforcement types. Our patron reached for a weapon, the cops beat her to the draw, and we were left without patron, payment, or the answers to some very urgent questions.

It seems that the enforcers were from Angerhelm's naval intelligence branch and that a vital defense cargo shipped under commercial cover had been re-routed by the computer codes we'd just used.

No longer headed for its intended destination, it was now bound for a Nullian League front company.

*A Hinterworlds Adventure
by Thomas MacCarrol
Design and Editorial Assistance
by Charles E. Gannon*

A well-off female patron contacts the PCs to do some slightly shady work involving copying computer files. The referee can direct this computer run in whatever fashion he sees fit, perhaps giving player characters with more "sedentary," as opposed to action-oriented, skill strengths a chance in the limelight. After the run, which should go off with only minor hitches to preserve the PCs' sense of challenge, the characters will be confronted by (what seem to be) law enforcement officials when they try to deliver the goods to their patron (who should expire in the encounter). The PCs will then be left to answer some rather pointed questions about their activities.

THE "DEAL"

After questioning the group for several hours at his headquarters, the naval intelligence officer, Captain Smith, becomes convinced that the PCs are only innocent dupes and not a willing part of the plot.

Truth: He explains that Angerhelm expects an attack by its neighbor, the Nullian League, in the very near future. Since the technological gap between Angerhelm (TL9) and the expected front-line league forces (TL13, with some TL14 and TL15 stiffening) is so overwhelming, the planetary navy cannot hope to win a standup battle. Instead Angerhelm is planning for a long-term campaign of guerrilla resistance from supply caches in the asteroid belt, on minor moons, and in the far outer system. A key part of this strategy involved a shipment of 13 imported TL14 neutrino sensors that would allow the local boats to detect league ships in time to either avoid them or mass for a hit and run attack. The group's meddling diverted these sensors into enemy hands.

Captain Smith pauses a moment in his explanation to scan what records he has been able to obtain on the group. He appears to come to a decision, then resumes speaking to the PCs about some of the problems his agency anticipates in attempting to recover the missing sensors. The navy is stretched to its limit manning the hidden sites and the battle fleet, and supplying men and guidance to the star-merc units being hired to stiffen the defenses. The league has been seeding spies and agents into all areas of government. They've also succeeded in subverting the loyalty of some local officials. Smith has very few people he can trust to deal with a sensitive matter like this. All of them are busy on other critical cases.

Or Consequences: After viewing the PCs' records and interviewing them, Smith is convinced that the players are fairly honest and above-board, and, as outsiders, they are actually less of a security risk than local personnel. In addition, the PCs now owe Angerhelm a solution to the problem they caused. Smith will imply dire consequences if the PCs do not fulfill this obligation. Smith's leverage is not limited to the group's moral obligation: The PCs' payment (from their now-dead patron) and starship—if any—has been impounded and will not be returned unless the sensors are recovered.

Also, while Smith is convinced the group was not part of the plot, his superiors aren't. Unless the case is solved quickly, he'll have to turn the characters over to the rest of Naval Intelligence, where they can look forward to many unpleasant days of interrogation.

Smith also has some positive rewards available: an up-front fund of Cr4000 per character, deposited in a numbered account in the capital city. This can be drawn on for expenses anywhere in-system. Ten times that amount will be added later to each of the accounts if the characters are successful.

Pertinent Details: Once the group accepts the deal (really an offer they "cannot refuse"), Smith tells them the missing sensors probably wound up in or near Loflon, a small coastal city on the other side of the continent. He gives them a list of five suspected league front corporations in that city that are the most likely recipients of the sensors. Smith also has the PCs memorize the location of a drop-off point deep in the outer system where they are to take the sensors once they are recovered.

THE BREAKOUT

Since he cannot simply let the characters walk away to begin

their search, Smith arranges for them to be confined in a safe house out in the countryside "for further questioning." Once there, he promises he will

contrive a lapse in the security measures. The players will have to seize the moment and make a break for it. After the escape, Smith can only stall his superiors for a short time, then the hunt will be on. Naval Intelligence, then the regular police, will be told the characters are wanted felons. The PCs have five or six days after their escape before the net closes. If they haven't recovered the sensors by then, the characters will be in such a world of hurt that even Smith won't be able to save them.

At the Safe House: It's late afternoon when the group is moved to a sprawling estate in farming country. The player characters are taken into the main house (a minor mansion) and locked into a second floor room. The house is a modern reproduction of a Terran northern hemisphere manor house, and the PCs' "guest room" seems to be the library. In the room are wall cases filled with print books and a model 1 computer built into a desk. (The computer holds only general library data and many literary text files. It is not connected with any data network.) The windows are covered with heavy fabric drapes held back on one side by a thick silken cord. The windows are open, but two armed guards are posted on the path underneath them. Most of the floor space is taken up by a massive table and a dozen equally massive chairs made of a dark imported wood. A large harp takes up the corner opposite the computer. The other end of the room is dominated by a huge stone fireplace, complete with a hanging shield (bearing an impressive coat of arms) over a massive crossed sword and a mace.

An Opportunity to Escape: Most of the guards leave with the grav sled that brought the group here, but six remain behind. As night begins to fall, two of the guards are seen patrolling the grounds in a wheeled vehicle. Shortly afterward, the PCs see the vehicle in a floral bed, canted over at an odd angle. They also see the two guards below their window running toward it to help their comrades. With only two guards left to cover the large building, now is as good a chance as the group will ever have.

Referee: The actual escape at this point is simple—just walk downstairs and out the back door. The two remaining guards will not encounter the party members unless the group actively seeks to find and disarm them. Complications may grow from player character actions. For instance, climbing out the window on a rope made from the drapes will allow a reasonable chance for one party member to get hurt (construct an appropriate task). The same is true for any attempts to overpower the guard staff.

Grab What You Can, Then Leave: The PCs have only what they were carrying when they were arrested. All obvious weapons have been removed. Thoughtful groups will want to acquire provisions, equipment, and some sort of weaponry before leaving the site. Allow them to quickly search the room they were held in, or logical places like the kitchens or the gardener's shed, but don't permit them unlimited time to thoroughly loot the place. Some examples of what can be quickly gained are:

- The heavy drapes can serve as tenting.
- The harp strings could serve as jumper wires to bypass electronic devices or hot-wire vehicles, or as garottes.
- The medieval weapons from the wall are useful in a fight, but will break after two or three good hits. (They're cheap reproductions, not real war gear.)
- Bedding can be quickly stolen and used as carrying material.
- About 20 person-days of readily portable "field rations" can be liberated from the kitchens.

MEGATRAVELLER

● The gardener's shed holds an assortment of clubs, cudgels, and shears that can make four crude (half-damage) blades.

● If the PCs choose to overpower the two guards stationed inside, they stand to gain an auto-slug loaded with tranq and a flak vest for each guard subdued. A generous referee might add a shotgun and some extra ammunition; however, actually overcoming the guards should be played out tactically, not glossed over.

Aftermath: The escape will be hushed up at first, and once clear of the grounds, the PCs should have a few days without fear of detection. However, trying to double-cross Smith and head offworld will fail at the extralix barrier.

VARKGRIS

The players will recall passing over a small town not too far west of the house on the way in, and this will most probably be where they head for first. They'll have to spend at least one night out in the woods/fields and one day hiking overland until they reach Varkgris—a small settlement of about 800 people that serves as a marketplace for surrounding farms. Varkgris is typical of most of the planet except for the few big cities. It is full of hardworking, honest folk who are friendly and helpful toward strangers, especially if they seem to have had a bit of hard luck lately. While warm and generous, they aren't stupid, so don't allow the characters to take too much advantage of the locals. Play them as sympathetic, concerned adults, not saps. (This should go a ways toward reducing any ill feeling toward this world Smith may have engendered. Even he isn't heartless, just desperate.)

Facilities: Available in Varkgris are a bank where the numbered expense account can be tapped for cash, a food market, a sporting goods/general store, several grain elevators and agricultural product warehouses, and a freight-only maglev rail spur. (Stowing away is easy, but without knowledge of the system PCs can end up going in the wrong direction or can be stranded in the middle of nowhere.)

General Store: The general store has a full line of camping gear, outdoor clothing, and athletic equipment (some of which could be used as clubs). In a locked display case are a 13mm rifle, a 7mm rifle, two shotguns, a 5mm revolver and a 9mm revolver, along with 100 rounds of 13mm ammo, 50 rounds of 9mm, 50 rounds of 7mm, 50 rounds of 5mm, and 250 shotgun shells filled with pellets. None of this is for sale to offworlders or even to locals without a slew of permits. A note regarding would-be forgers: The shopkeepers know the issuing officials personally and will detect even a perfectly executed set of phony papers. If the PCs try burglary:

To break into the shop:

Easy, Intrusion, Dex, 3 sec.

Referee: Mishap damage is applied to the door.

To break into the display case:

Routine, Intrusion, Dex, 30 sec (fateful, nonhazardous).

Referee: A mishap more serious than Superficial means that a PC has tripped the alarm system while trying to bypass it. The police will respond in five minutes.

Transport: Wheeled passenger cars or trucks are parked at every home and many businesses. None are available for hire, but a wheeled truck can be purchased from a local for Cr400. Three can fit in the cab with crowding; any others must ride outside in the cargo bin.

Theft of any of these vehicles is very easy. All have the doors open, and half have the ignitions unlocked. However, theft is really not necessary, as almost any local will give the PCs a ride to the larger nearby town of Staghaven, where more transit facilities are available.

STAGHAVEN

At Staghaven the PCs will learn that most civil aviation vehicles (including orbital and suborbital shuttles) have been mobilized as military auxiliaries. Seats on the remaining craft have been booked for months in

advance. It will take more time and money than the player characters have to finagle their way onto a flight for the other coast.

Passenger service is still available on the maglev railway system, but at the ticket office, the group will be told that tickets are issued on the basis of priorities. Routine passengers can be kept on stand-by for days.

To determine that the ticket agent can be bribed into selling a priority pass:

Routine, Bribery, Streetwise, Int, Instant (uncertain).

Referee: Ticket price is Cr200 each; the bribe needs to be at least Cr50 for the entire group.

Wheeled vehicles or ACVs can be purchased or rented in Staghaven, but at war-scare rates (three times the normal price).

CROSS-COUNTRY JOURNEY

The trip across the continent is about 3500 kilometers and will vary in time, depending on the mode of transit used. By maglev train, it will take about 10 hours (with stops and delays). If the PCs are using a ground car, each driver will be able to drive the vehicle for about 600 kilometers per day. With one driver, the trip will require just under six days. With several drivers working in shifts, the time reduces to a minimum of about 40 hours. Costs are about Cr600 for fuel and up to Cr30 per person per night for lodging (unless the group chooses to camp out).

Roll for encounters on the table below once every four hours that the group is on the road.

CROSS-COUNTRY ENCOUNTERS

2D6	Result
2	Major breakdown
3	Minor breakdown
4	Minor breakdown
5	Military convoy
6	Normal traffic (no encounter)
7	Normal traffic (no encounter)
8	Normal traffic (no encounter)
9	Military convoy
10	Militia checkpoint
11	Detour
12	Militia checkpoint

Minor Breakdown: Use the following tasks:

To repair major breakdown:

Routine, Mechanical, Edu, 2 hr.

To repair a minor breakdown:

Routine, Mechanical, Edu, 20 min.

Military Convoy: The road is clogged with large, slow-moving vehicles belonging to the Angerhelm Army. The soldiers are in full combat rig and look both bored and scared. Getting by adds 1D6x20 minutes to trip time.

Militia Checkpoint: At a bridge or intersection, a group of armed locals is stopping all vehicles to check identity papers and question drivers. They are members of a local home guard unit and are not really sure why they are here, except to find enemy spies. Their "uniforms" consist of armbands and the occasional military cap or shirt. Discovering the group to be offworlders, they become almost abusive in their demands for the group members to identify themselves, where they are going, and why.

To pass the checkpoint successfully:

Routine, Persuasion, Admin, Int, 1 min.

Referee: Add cumulative negative DMs: "Bad attitude" is dis-

played (-2); the group has not had any civilized lodging for 36+ hours (-2); a bladed weapon is displayed (-4); their firearms are displayed (-8). A failed task means detention; use the applicable previous DMs as positive modifiers to the Mishap Table. A Minor or less serious mishap means the group is held for 2D6x3 minutes of verbal dressing-down before being sent on its way. A Major mishap means the PCs are held and turned over to the police. If they are wanted for any criminal acts, they are in deep trouble. A Destroyed result means the trigger-happy militia members fire one round each from a mix of shotguns and assorted rifles.

Detour: Military police have closed the highway for a reason they are not telling the PCs. Add 3D6x20 minutes to the travel time necessary for the group to reach their goal. Enough firepower is present at this site to finish the group 16 times over. Impress this on them.

ARRIVAL IN LOFLON

This is a true city. The party can find almost any goods or services consistent with its tech and law levels. Imported items are expensive (four times what they "should" cost) and may not be available at all, at the referee's discretion. Illegal items can be found, but the search for the right people will take much more time than the group has left. "Self-defense" items, such as tranq spray and tangle nets, are available (if the characters remember to seek them out).

Where Did the Sensors Go?: Finding where the sensors went could take forever, except that a check of commercial sources (cargo brokers, driver's unions, utilities, comm system, etc.), shows that three of the firms on the list Smith gave the group only deal in money, not goods, and have no storage space. Of the two remaining firms, one is in the bulk grain business, and no one remembers it ever getting any other kind of freight. The last company, Agus, Scuth & Shield, not only deals in large numbers of general freight shipments, but maintains extensive private warehouses at the city's spaceport, with a private landing pad/loading apron as well.

Discovering the above information should eat up a day or two of heavy interpersonal contacts, searches in library systems and directories, and tracking down interview subjects. This can be as abstract (or detailed) as the group and referee desire.

Checking Out A, S & S: Casing the A, S & S facility shows that it is tucked away on the side of the port away from the city, surrounded by a separate chain link fence. It is patrolled by private security officers wearing cloth armor and armed with autosnubs. (The number of security guards is low and should be in keeping with the capabilities of the group at this point—no more than three or four in any event.) A local grav-powered spacecraft of 20-ton displacement is on the loading apron. Most of the area is well lit, and sneaking in seems unlikely.

BREAKING INTO A, S & S

Up to this point the best path has been to keep cool and not start trouble. Now, the more aggressive the PCs are, the more likely they are to survive, let alone succeed in their mission. By now the party probably has or is planning to get some sort of weaponry.

Outside Guards: The outside guards are hired locally, and while they will defend their employer's property, this is just a job. If they don't have a clear chance to win an encounter with the group, they will withdraw (and raise an alarm) or surrender if no escape is at hand.

Picking Them Off One By One: If any attention is paid to the guard pattern, the player characters can note that one guard's beat takes her past a relatively dark corner of the compound every 10 to 15 minutes. If they time it right, the party members can slip through the fence at that spot (anybody pick up some tools in town?) and be waiting in ambush when she comes back.

Confronted by a group of armed and desperate people, this individual will give up quietly. If anyone looks, her autosnub has been loaded with live ammo, and she has two reload clips inside her

jacket. If she is still able to answer questions after the PCs encounter her, she will tell them the lethal ammo was special-issued a few days ago because of a "very

valuable shipment" inside. She knows that most of the firm's local sales force have gathered inside tonight for a meeting (adjust numbers—and armament—to the capabilities of the group). She has no knowledge regarding the presence of the weapons inside, or the nature and location of the "very valuable shipment."

When she doesn't reappear out front, another guard will come looking for her, not expecting to find anything seriously wrong. The same sort of trap as was sprung on the first guard can be sprung several more times, trimming the outside security by up to three people. (This could be all of the outside guards. Anyone remember to buy handcuffs or bring the curtain cords from the safe house?)

Entering the Warehouse: If noisy combat occurs outside or if an alarm is raised, those inside will take some time to sort themselves out, then begin to set up a defense. They have at least one weapon capable of fully automatic fire, and several magazine-fed rifles. (Treat these as 7mm rifles, but they fire 20 shots before having to be reloaded.)

If the PCs burst in unannounced, they will automatically gain surprise over a group of men in dark civilian clothing cleaning and assembling rifles, unpacking grenades, and plugging laser weapon power packs into charging outlets. This combat can be as long or short as the referee deems suitable for his campaign group, but a few facts should become apparent to the PCs during the combat:

- The storage area is huge, covering several floors of a windowless building with many wings, ells, and side bays.
- This place is crawling with illegal weapons of a paramilitary bent.
- These people are willing to fight to the finish.

The idea, of course, is not to slaughter the characters. They should find the defenders a few at a time, preferably after the PCs have captured some of the firepower lying around. If the group has gotten in without alerting the A, S & S people ahead of time, their defenses will be even more disorganized and will tend toward handguns rather than longarms.

At least once, the group should be confronted with a fanatic defender with a rapid-fire weapon and lots of ammunition barricaded into a very defensible, bulletproof position. It will take several minutes to get into a safe position from which to incapacitate this person. At another point in the shoot-out, all the lights, except for some battery backup units, should go out.

WHERE ARE THOSE SENSORS?

Having gained control of the warehouse the old-fashioned way, now all the player characters have to do is search it for a few smallish crates that are probably relabeled. Considering the size of the warehouse and the sheer number of crates in it, a manual search is obviously out of the question. The main office—and its computerized inventory system—is in the east wing of the top floor. Fortunately, the computer system has an internal battery good for up to six hours of normal operation.

To find location of sensors:

Routine, Computer, Admin, Edu, 5 min (uncertain).

Referee: The storage area is coded as to area, floor, row, and bin. A result of no truth means no notice of the shipment can be found. A result of partial truth means a false location is selected. This will become obvious once the location is checked (after about 20 minutes, 10 if radios or other communications devices are used to direct movements inside the warehouse). Full truth shows that the shipment is indeed in the building *somewhere*, but the location code given is fictitious (no such floor in that wing, the rows aren't numbered that high, etc.).

MEGATRAVELLER

Before, during, or after all this computer activity, if anyone looks around the office space, he may notice that the fresher is out of order. The sign on the door is several days old. It seems odd that the unit would be allowed to be out of service for so long in such a busy and obviously well kept office. If they check inside the fresher, they'll see that the ceiling is half torn down, and the walls have been stripped of their inner covering. A pile of boxes labeled "Ceramic tile, blue-white, 144 ea." blocks up most of the floor space. The bored PC who counts these cases and discovers that there are 13 of them

should begin to get an idea where the missing sensors were stashed.

All the PCs have to do now is lug the pesky things downstairs (the lift shafts stopped running when the power failed), load them into the handy 20-ton spacecraft, and lift-off to go make their rendezvous in the outer system.

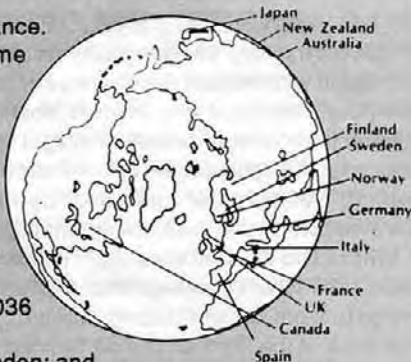
This trip should be uneventful.

Captain Smith will be so relieved to get the shipment back that he will call off the authorities and pay the characters as agreed. Ω

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*Colonel Zeendir Trabani, Imperial Naval Intelligence,
from "Report on Special Psionic Abilities of the Zhodani"*
(Top Secret: Eyes Only)

The **MegaTraveller Players' Manual** offers several psionic talents and a "special" category. This article covers a number of "special" talents for the Zhodani (and even PCs and NPCs, if the referee feels so generous). All these talents are subject to the normal psionics rules plus a few rules specific to each talent.

COMPRESSION

The character can create telekinetic force on the external surface of an object, crushing it. The following tasks are used with these Psi cost modifiers to all: +1 if the object is semirigid (like plastic), +2 if the object is hard (wood, metal), +4 if the object is very hard (armor, structural metals).

To compress an object with a volume of less than 1 liter:

Simple, Compression, Int, 6 sec.

Referee: The Psi cost is 1+range+substance modifier.

To compress an object with a volume of less than 10 liters:

Routine, Compression, Int, 6 sec.

Referee: The Psi cost is 2+range+substance modifier.

To compress an object with a volume of less than 100 liters:

Difficult, Compression, Int, 6 sec.

Referee: The Psi cost is 4+range+substance modifier.

To compress an object with a volume of less than 1000 liters:

Formidable, Compression, Int, 6 sec.

Referee: The Psi cost is 8+range+substance modifier.

CRYOKINESIS

The character can cause the molecules of an object to slow, thereby causing the temperature of the object to decrease.

To lower the temperature of an object:

Routine, Cryokinesis, Int, 10 sec.

Referee: The Psi cost is range+1 point per 50°F drop.

DISRUPTION

The character can disrupt inanimate objects, causing them to explode. Treat the explosion as that of TL11 conventional explosives if the item exploded is hard, such as metal. If it is soft, like living tissue, it just makes a really big mess.

To disrupt an object with a volume of less than 1 liter:

Simple, Disruption, Int, 3 sec.

Referee: The Psi cost is 1+range.

To disrupt an object with a volume of less than 10 liters:

Difficult, Disruption, Int, 3 sec.

Referee: The Psi cost is 3+range.

Routine, Disruption, Int, 3 sec.

Referee: The Psi cost is 3+range.

To disrupt an object with a volume of less than 100 liters:

Difficult, Disruption, Int, 6 sec.

Referee: The Psi cost is 5+range.

To disrupt an object with a volume of less than 1000 liters:

Formidable, Disruption, Int, 10 sec.

Referee: The Psi cost is 8+range.

ENHANCEMENT

This is essentially the same as Awareness, but the character can only Enhance others. Psi cost is one more than the number of points added to the enhanced characteristic. Also, the receiving character must roll the value of the characteristic before enhancement or lower on 3D for the enhancement to take effect. If the receiving character succeeds, the enhancement works as described in the **MegaTraveller Players' Manual**. If he fails, he was not properly prepared for the experience and takes temporary damage to the characteristic equal to one-half the number of Psi points expended (rounded down), which lasts as long as the prospective increase would have. If the receiving character is psionic, a DM of -4 is applied to the roll. If the receiver has Awareness, he does not have to make this roll.

Enhancement cannot be used to cause suspended animation.

The Enhancement tasks are the same as the Awareness tasks, but Psi costs are one more than those given on pages 99-100 of the **Players' Manual**. See restrictions above.

HALLUCINATION

The character can induce hallucinations in others. The hallucination seems perfectly real in the minds of those affected, as long as the psionic character concentrates. If the illusion is of something extremely unusual, contradictory, or unlikely, or if the subject is psionic, the referee may make a secret task roll for the subject. This talent will not work on Hivers because their mind structure is radically different from humans.

To induce an illusion in a member of one's own species:

Difficult, Hallucination, Int, 20 sec.

Referee: The Psi cost is 1+range.

To induce an illusion in a member of an alien race (except Hivers):

Formidable, Hallucination, Int, 60 sec.

Referee: The Psi cost is 4+range.

To disbelieve an illusion:

Difficult, Off=Int, Psi, Def=Det, Psi, Instant (confrontation).

MEGATRAVELLER

Referee: This task is undertaken by people affected by illusions which are extremely contradictory or unlikely. If the task is passed, the illusion disappears from the victim's mind. If it is failed, the victim believes the illusion.

LINK

The character can link several other psionic persons together with himself in order to increase his psionic ability or that of one of the others. The character can link up to as many psionics as he has Psi strength points. To establish a link, all members must be in physical contact. When a link is established, all of the Psi points of the link group are totaled, then channeled into one of the members. For every 10 Psi points in the total, an extra point is added for each member who has the Link talent (rounded down). For example, if five psionics with Psi ratings of 4, 7, 3, 8, and 6 (total 28) establish a link, and three of them have Link, the total would be 34 (28+6). The points are then used by the receiving character as usual, as long as the group remains in contact and concentrates. If contact is broken, the Psi points are lost. When the link is terminated, all members have zero Psi points.

To link with 4 or fewer psionic individuals:

Routine, Link, Int, 15 sec.

Referee: For each additional member of the linking group who has Link, apply a +1 DM to the roll.

To link with 5 or more psionic individuals:

Difficult, Link, Int, 20 sec.

Referee: For each additional member of the linking group who has Link, apply a +1 DM to the roll.

MEMORY

This talent enables the character to retain all information he is exposed to permanently, perfectly and without error. The character's memory cannot be tampered with by any means, including hypnosis, telepathy, or drugs. There is no Psi cost for using Memory, but if a character gains Memory, his Psi strength decreases by six permanently. If he does not have six Psi points, however, the character cannot gain Memory, even if the dice say otherwise. Memory allows a character to learn faster, decreasing formal training time for nonphysical skills by one-third. Memory also gives a character a +3 DM to learning skills by experience.

PYROKINESIS

With this talent, a psionic can excite the molecules of an object, causing it to heat

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and burst into flames. See the substance modifiers given under Compression.

To ignite an object:

Difficult, Pyrokinesis, Int, 6 sec.

Referee: Psi cost is range+substance modifier+1 per five liters of target volume. It is not necessary to ignite the entire object—a small portion aflame may spread sufficiently, depending on the substance burning.

STATIC

The character's body emits electromagnetic static, disrupting radio communications. Any radio device within close range of the character will not operate unless he successfully attempts a task to dampen the effects. The character can also cause the static field to expand from his body up to the number of range bands equal to his Psi strength (i.e., a character with Psi 7 could jam radios up to Very Distant range).

To dampen the static effect:

Routine, Static, Det, 2 sec.

Referee: This task allows the psionic to lower the dampening field for one turn. There is no Psi cost.

To extend the range of Static beyond close range:

Routine, Static, Int, 4 sec.

Referee: The Psi cost is 0+range modifier.

TECHEMPATHY

This talent is identical to telepathy, except the character can only communicate with computers

or other "intelligent" mechanical devices. Using this talent, a character can gain information from, give instructions to, or psionically assault computers and robots. Techempathy does not allow the psionic to control artificially intelligent models. He can only make suggestions.

Techempathy allows the user to learn technical skills such as Computer or Robotics in half the time, and gain two ATs instead of one when using such a skill after observation.

These tasks assume the subject to be a nonintelligent computer. If the subject is an artificially intelligent ro-

bot or computer, increase task difficulty by one level.

To gain basic information about a computer:

Routine, Techempathy, Int, 6 sec (uncertain).

Referee: The Psi cost is 0+range. This task allows the psionic to learn basic information about the computer or robot, such as its capabilities, etc. Computer or Robotics may be used instead of Intelligence as a DM.

To gain data from a computer:

Difficult, Techempathy, Int, 6 sec (uncertain).

Referee: The Psi cost is 1+range. The character can gain any information available in the computer's memory that doesn't have security protection on it. For instance, a character could gain information from a starport computer about which ships are docked there, but information on the owner would likely be protected and inaccessible. Computer or Robotics may be used instead of Intelligence as a DM for this task.

To probe a computer's memory:

Difficult, Techempathy, Int, 60 sec (hazardous).

Referee: The Psi cost is 6+range. This allows the character access to all information in the computer's memory, regardless of security classification. If a mishap occurs, apply it as damage to the computer. Computer or Robotics may be used instead of Intelligence as a DM.

To send instructions or programming to a computer:

Difficult, Techempathy, Int, 10 sec.

Referee: The Psi cost is 2+range. The psionic can send simple instructions or programs to a computer. If the computer is a nonintelligent model, such as a starship computer, it will act out the programming to the best of its ability. If the subject is an intelligent model, such as an android, it will receive the instructions as requests. It will be compelled to follow the instructions, but can resist if they go against its built-in programming. Computer or Robotics may be used instead of Intelligence as a DM.

To psionically assault a computer:

Formidable, Techempathy, Int, 1 sec.

Referee: The Psi cost is 10+range. Roll 3D on the Mishap Table to determine the level of damage to the computer. If the computer has electronic circuit protection, roll 2D to determine damage.

TELEPORTATION (OTHERS)

This is essentially the same as Teleportation. The character can teleport other objects and people, but cannot teleport his own body. The subject or object to be teleported must be within five meters, and the character must be looking at it. The tasks are the same as for Teleportation (**Players' Manual**, pages 100-101), and Psi costs are two more than those given. Ω

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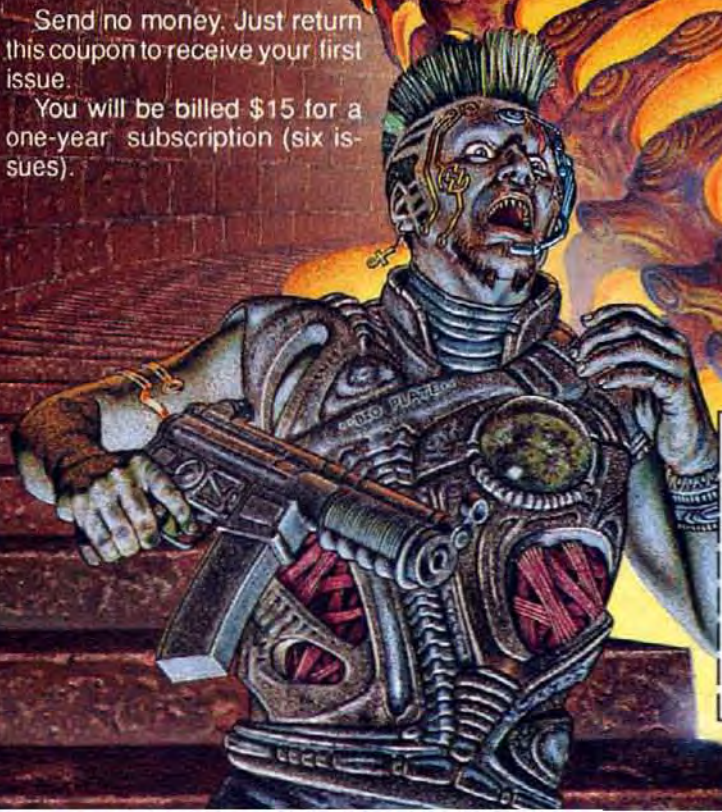
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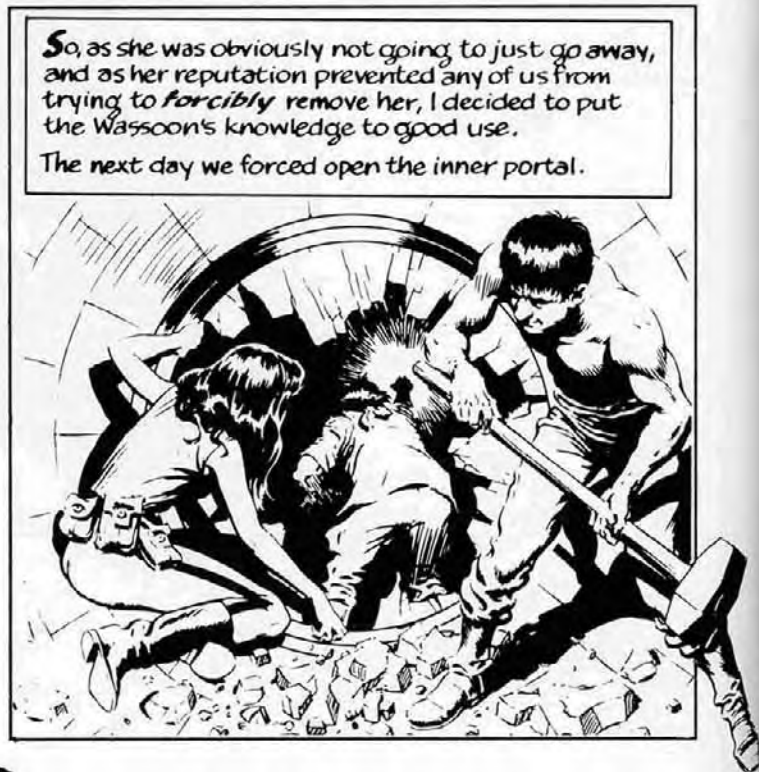
The Horror Below

Frank Chadwick

Cadillacs and Dinosaurs, GDW's newest RPG, is set 500 years in the future during the Xenozoic Era, following unprecedented geologic and ecologic cataclysms. Most of present-day civilization has been swept away, and the handful of surviving humans battle dinosaurs, a hostile environment, and often each other for survival.

C & D is based on the award-winning comic book *Xenozoic Tales* from Kitchen Sink Press, currently being reprinted in color by Marvel Comics under the Epic label. Written and drawn by Mark Schultz, it has been a cult favorite with comic professionals for years.

One of the appeals of **C & D** is its compatibility with **Twilight: 2000**, which uses the same game system. Veteran referees and players will find it easy to play **C & D** as a novel change of pace and can even use their **Twilight: 2000** characters, if desired.



The tribe (an enclave of humans in **Cadillacs & Dinosaurs**) sends out exploratory parties from time to time. One of these parties disappeared several months ago and was presumed lost. A few days ago, however, a lone survivor made his way to an outlying farm and was brought to the city. He was in very bad shape, suffering from starvation, exposure, and serious burns on his legs and abdomen. He babbled incoherently for a day and then died.

The tribal council is naturally interested in finding out what happened to the rest of the expedition members. Since their intended route is known and they followed standard operating procedures in marking their trail, their tracks should be easy to follow.

APPROACH

The characters will follow the trail of the earlier expedition for a week or more. This part of the adventure should rely on the **C & D** wilderness random encounter rules to add spice and excitement. **Twilight: 2000**, of course, does not include dinosaurs in its random encounter section, but we have included a short section covering them at the end of this adventure.

Although the PCs may have a number of narrow escapes, they will continue to find clear evidence that the first expedition passed this way and was not overwhelmed by natural predators along the way.

When the characters have forged far enough into the interior, they will come to a complex of low, white concrete buildings built atop a hill and overlooking the valley the PCs are travelling in. They are visible for several miles before the PCs arrive at them, and the trail leads directly toward them. Obviously the first expedition saw them as well and headed there to investigate.

The hill is taller than it looks from a distance and is almost solid rock. The buildings are in ruins and appear to date from before the global catastrophe. The buildings are on the southwest edge of the hilltop, which terminates in a steep, broken cliff. A stream, or spring, exits the west cliff face as a waterfall, perhaps 10 meters down from the edge of the cliff.

A search of the surrounding area shows no sign that the expedition ever

left the hill once it arrived there. Evidence of several days worth of camping is present (a fire pit, several latrines, a refuse pit), as are the broken, scattered remnants of some of the expedition's equipment. Two human skeletons lie near the buildings, both completely, but recently, picked clean.

Entrance To The Lower Levels: There are two entrances to the lower level, marked "A" and "B" on the map. Neither is immediately visible, but both are fairly easy to find if a search is made of the ruins. Which one the party members discover first will depend on where they look. They should only discover the second entrance if they continue to search after finding the first one.

Entrance point B is a concrete staircase leading down into a narrow, dark corridor. Entrance point A is a jagged hole in the cement roof of the lower level, partially covered by a piece of collapsed wall. Descent here must be by means of a rope.

Twisted and rusted pieces of steel reinforcing bar jut out from the sides of entrance point A's hole, making it a dangerous climb down. (Roll for a Routine task versus Agility to avoid injury. If the character fails, he suffers three hit points to a random body location. If he fails catastrophically, he suffers 1D6 hit points to a random body location, falls, and suffers 2D6 hit points to one of his legs.)

REFEREEING THE ADVENTURE

The complex is a precatastrophic (or prewar in **Twilight: 2000**) genetic research facility, which has become the lair for two species of altered animal life (super ants and giant slugs). Whether this alteration was deliberate or has taken place over time as a result of the global catastrophe is unclear. The earlier expedition stumbled across these life forms, and most were killed by them. The lone survivor was severely injured and died shortly after returning to the tribe.

As the characters explore the complex, they will encounter ample evidence of age and ruin. Most rooms are full of plaster dust and broken furniture. The hilltop is fairly dry, so papers on the first level will still be reasonably intact, particularly those in desk drawers. They

are mostly bureaucratic forms of no interest or value, however.

The PCs will occasionally hear scratching sounds down the corridor, the sound of the super ants at work. The referee should describe the sounds, but not reveal what they represent. (Questions like "Do they sound like giant insects?" should be answered with "How many giant insects have you ever heard?")

The ants have extensive chambers in the ground surrounding the complex, but the tunnels are too small for humans to enter. The entryways to the nest (located in these external chambers) are through the collapsed walls and rubble piles on the first level near room 1G and its adjoining stairway. Once disturbed, warrior ants will begin emerging from here in considerable numbers and will quickly cut off access to the two entry points.

The second level, by contrast, is very damp, and an inch or two of water covers the floor everywhere. A gentle current runs from room 2A, where the water is seeping in, to room 2K, where it drains down the staircase to the lower level. Giant slugs will be encountered in room 2A (in all likelihood).

If the PCs have become cut off from the surface, which is likely, a retreat to the third level will eventually lead them to room 3G, where the underground stream passes through a large crack in the foundations. The PCs can follow the tunnel of the stream to the cliff face and then climb down to safety. They may also climb up, but will then have to fight 4D6 ants, which will be investigating their supplies. In addition to this initial group, 1D6 more ants will emerge from entry point B every turn.

MAP DESCRIPTION

Most rooms are full of broken furniture, rusty electronic components, shredded documents used by rodents for nests, dust, and broken plaster. All are labeled on the map, but only the following are of special interest.

Level 1

1A: A jumbled pile of rubble litters the corridor floor, lit by sunlight from a jagged hole in the ceiling above.

1B: A stairway at the end of the hall leads up into the sunlight.

.460 Weatherby Magnum

This weapon fires the most powerful rifle cartridge ever produced and was designed for very large game, such as elephants and rhinos. An integral muzzle break and reinforced stock help absorb recoil, but it is still a shoulder-bruiser to fire.

Ammo: .460 Magnum.

Wt: 5 kg.

Mag: 3 individual.

Price: \$2000 (R/R).

Weapon	ROF	Dam	Pen	Blk	—Recoil—		Rng
					SS	Brst	
.460 Weatherby	BA	7	2-3-5	6	5	—	75

Holland & Holland .600 Nitro

First produced shortly after the turn of the century, the Holland & Holland .600 Nitro Express Double Rifle was the most powerful hunting rifle in the world until that honor was taken by the .460 Weatherby Magnum. Its two barrels are side by side, and it breaks open at the action for reloading, like a double-barrelled shotgun.

Ammo: .600 Nitro Express.

Wt: 7 kg.

Mag: 2 individual.

Price: \$1800 (R/R).

Weapon	ROF	Dam	Pen	Blk	—Recoil—		Rng
					SS	Brst	
H&H .600 Nitro	SA	7	2-4-6	5	4	—	60

Winchester M70 "African"

Designed specifically as a big game rifle, the M70 is only slightly less powerful than the Weatherby and is handier to use. It is adequate to bring down any land animal currently on the planet, but is perhaps a little light for dinosaurs.

Ammo: .458 Magnum.

Wt: 4 kg.

Mag: 3 individual.

Price: \$1200 (S/R).

Weapon	ROF	Dam	Pen	Blk	—Recoil—		Rng
					SS	Brst	
Winchester M70	BA	6	2-4-Nil	5	4	—	60

Boys Mark I Antitank Rifle

Named after its designer, Captain Boys, this was the standard squad antitank weapon in the British Army early in WWII. Soon rendered obsolete as an antitank weapon by increasing armor thickness, it was retained as a special-purpose sniper weapon (e.g., by US Rangers). A few examples may still be found. The weapon has a cushioned stock, muzzle break, and folding monopod brace, all intended to absorb recoil. It is virtually unfireable except from the monopod, which makes a planned shot necessary. Given time to set up, it is an ideal long-range dinosaur killer.

Ammo: .55 Boys AP.

Wt: 16 kg.

Mag: 5 box.

Price: \$1500 (R/R).

Weapon	ROF	Dam	Pen	Blk	—Recoil—		Rng
					SS	Brst	
Mk I Boys ATR	BA	10	2-2-3	8	8	—	75
monopod	BA	10	2-2-3	8	4	—	150

1F: The door is off the hinges to this room, and the characters hear a scratching sound as they pass by. The room was some sort of infirmary, with medicine cabinets and an examination table, all of which are white under their grime. In the corner is a jumble of boxes and crates. A scratching sound comes from there at first, then silence.

A red scout ant is lurking in the cases and will attack as soon as a character approaches and disturbs its hiding place.

1G: The door to this room is off its hinges. The west end of the room is a collapsed pile of rubble, and several small openings are visible in it. Six red worker ants scurry about the room, turning and disappearing into the holes as soon as they see the characters. After four turns, warrior ants begin emerging from the holes at a rate of 1D6 per turn.

1J: This hollow, lightweight metal door is locked, but a bullet or two into the lock will open it. Inside are the shrivelled remains of three warrior ants and several large bloodstains on the floor. The connecting door to 1L is also locked, but is of the same type.

1L: A stairway leads down into blackness in the southeast corner of the room. Several bloodstains are crusted in smears along the floor, as if wounded men had been dragged from the doorway to the stairs and then down.

1M: The door to this room is off its hinges and is lying inside the room. The room appears to be some sort of laboratory, with several large electronic machines of an unknown type. The six

Ammunition

.460 Magnum (11.6×74mm)

Wt: 16 kg per case of 200.

Price: \$150 per case (R/R).

.600 Nitro Express (15.7×76mm Rimmed)

Wt: 10 kg per case of 50.

Price: \$100 per case (R/R).

.458 Magnum (11.6×63.5mm)

Wt: 15 kg per case of 200.

Price: \$100 per case (S/R).

.55 Boys AP (13.9×99mm)

Wt: 15 kg per case of 100. 1 kg per 5-round magazine.

Price: \$100 per case (R/R).

worker ants in the room will attempt to flee as soon as they see the characters. They will flee through the doorway and past the character party, and will try to get to the openings in the rubble pile by the stairway. They will only bite if a character attempts to hold them or stop them. Four turns later warrior ants will begin emerging from the rubble pile at the rate of 1D6 per turn.

Level 2

2A: A large, stainless steel tank is built into a recess in the wall in the west end of the room. The wall is badly cracked and buckled, and stream water is running from the cracks into the tank, which is in turn spilling over onto the floor. A gentle current runs from here out into the corridor to the east. Two human skeletons lie twisted on the floor, recently picked clean.

1D6 slugs will begin appearing each turn from the large tank and attacking the nearest warm human body begin-

ning two turns after the PCs enter this room.

2B: The door from here to room 2C is wood, and the lower third is completely rotted away. The door to room 2A is hollow metal and can still be locked. It is not locked at the moment.

2C: The door to the corridor is lightweight metal and is sprung off of its hinges. Four red worker ants in the room will attempt to flee as soon as they see the characters.

2K: Both doors to this room are wooden. Although the hardware is intact, the doors are badly rotted. Ants will quickly chew through the doors while slugs will be able to break them down sooner or later. A stairway in this room leads further down.

2L: The door to this room is lightweight metal and is locked. A shot will open it. Inside are the remains of the other three members of the original expedition. They are badly decomposed, but have not been eaten.

Level 3

3C: The room has two closed steel doors, which are unlocked and will open easily. No water is inside the room, but it will begin flowing in as soon as the door is opened. The room is full of file cabinets which contain hard copies on the nature of the experimental work done at the lab. These will prove extremely valuable if they can be recovered and returned to the tribe.

3B: The room has an unlocked, closed steel door and will open easily. No water is inside the room, but it will begin flowing in as soon as the door is opened. This room is a fully stocked chemistry laboratory. Any character may make a Difficult task roll using Chemistry skill to quickly locate the chemicals necessary to improvise an incendiary bomb. This will kill a single slug and keep the rest at bay for 2D6 turns. Enough chemicals are present to make five such bombs. Some care must be exercised, however, as the flaming chemicals will tend to float back toward the characters due to the

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water current.

3G: This was a large furnace and storage room. The southeast corner of the room is badly damaged, and part of the floor has collapsed to reveal an underground stream. The general flow of water across the floor empties into the stream, exiting through an irregular hole on the western side of the wall. The hole is almost completely clogged with rubble, but the characters can clear it if they think to try.

Only one character can work at the entrance at a time. After four successful clearing tasks are made, the way is clear. Clearing the passage is a Difficult task using Strength.

Once the passage is clear, PCs may crawl through the stream's rock shaft to safety.

KILLER ANTS

Each of these ants is from 12 to 18 inches long and is a ruddy red in color. They have large, sharp mandibles and will attack with them when disturbed. While the scout and worker ants' jaws are not strong enough to do serious damage with a single bite, the sharp edges make for an excruciatingly pain-

ful wound. The warrior ants have oversized mandibles and much stronger jaws.

Each time a scout or worker ant bites a character, it causes one hit point of damage to the body part bitten (usually the leg or arm). In addition, the character must make a Routine task roll against his Constitution to avoid dropping the ant due to the pain of the bite. If he fails, he may not attack the ant, and if he is holding it he will let it go; if he fails catastrophically, he loses consciousness. If he succeeds, he may attack the ant as if he were not wounded.

Each time a warrior ant bites a person, the same procedure is followed. The only difference is that a warrior ant does 1D6 damage instead of one hit point.

Ants never check morale. As soon as slugs appear in a room with ants, however, the ants will withdraw.

SLUGS FROM HELL

The genetically altered slugs found in the lab complex nest in the large steel tank. This tank is over four meters deep and opens into a larger enclosure cut into the hillside, so there are a good

many more slugs nesting here than the PCs are likely to be able to deal with.

Each slug is between four and six feet in length, and weighs between 50 and 100 kilograms. The slugs do not have a highly developed nervous system or very complex internal organs—which makes them difficult to kill. Ignore the killing shot rule (given below) when dealing with slugs. If slugs fail morale, they will fall back for 1D6 turns and then resume the attack.

The slugs have no teeth or visible means of attack, but have extremely corrosive digestive fluids. They attack by holding their prey in their mouths and secreting digestive fluid. This causes burn damage the same as proximity to fire (1D6 per combat phase). A slug will continue to hold its victim until the slug dies or fails morale.

(The lone survivor of the original expedition had been burned by a slug but had somehow managed to escape.)

DINOSAURS

Twilight: 2000 has no provision for hunting dinosaurs (or being hunted by them), but the existing **Twilight: 2000** animal combat rules are the same as those used in **Cadillacs and Dinosaurs**, with a few modifications. **Twilight: 2000** animal statistics for dinosaurs are provided below, along with a few quick embellishments to the rules.

Target Size: Dinosaurs are very large targets. Add one to the chance of hitting for every 50 hits the animal can take. For example, a character would add four when firing at a brontosaurus, three when firing at a tyrannosaurus, etc.

Thick Skulls: All animals with a hit value of 50 or more are considered to be thick-skulled. Thick-skulled animals have an armor value of 1 when hit in the head, and head shots do not do double damage.

Neck Armor: The triceratops has a thick comb of armor covering its head and flaring back over its body. When a triceratops is facing the characters attacking it, all head, chest, and abdomen hits contact the neck armor, which has an AV of 1.

Killing Shot: Any aimed shot which hits the chest or head may constitute a killing shot. Roll a die. If the die roll is less than the damage value of the shot or the Small Arms skill of the firing charac-

Ants

Animal	Meat (x1D6)	Move	#App.	Hits	Attack	Hit #	Dam	CON
Warrior ant	—	4/8/—	1D6	4	100%	6	1D6	—
Scout ant	—	4/8/16	1	2	30%	4	1	—
Worker ant	—	4/8/12	1D6	3	20%	4	1	—

Slugs

Animal	Meat (x1D6)	Move	#App.	Hits	Attack	Hit #	Dam	CON
Slug	—	2/4/—	1D6	30	60%	5	1D6	10

Dinosaurs

Animal	Meat (x1D6)	Move	#App.	Hits	Attack	Hit #	Dam	CON
Tyrannosaurus	200	10/15/25	1	160	60%	6	8D6	80
Brontosaurus	400	10/15/20	2D6	200	20%	4	2D6	100
Triceratops	150	10/15/20	1D6	100	20%	6	4D6	50
Allosaurus	50	10/20/30	1D6	50	80%	8	4D6	25
Pteranodon	1	5/20/80	2D6	3	20%	4	1D6	—
Mastadon	150	10/15/30	1D6	100	30%	4	5D6	50
Saber-T tiger	30	10/20/40	1	40	50%	8	4D6	20
Cave bear	30	10/20/30	1	40	40%	6	2D6	30

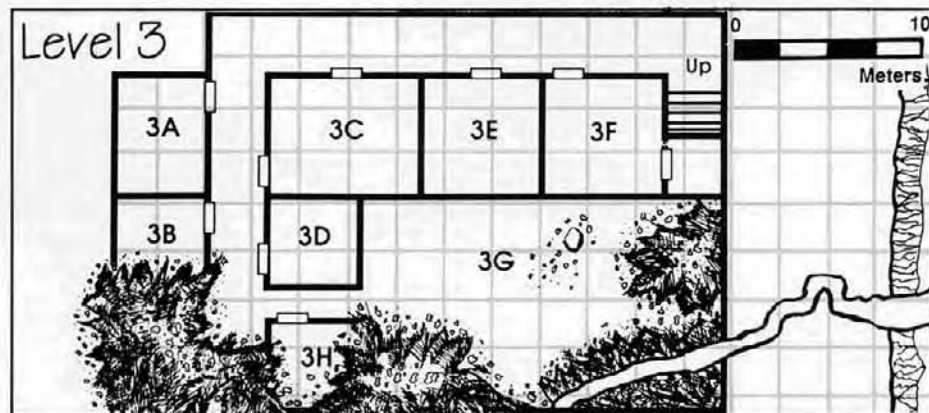
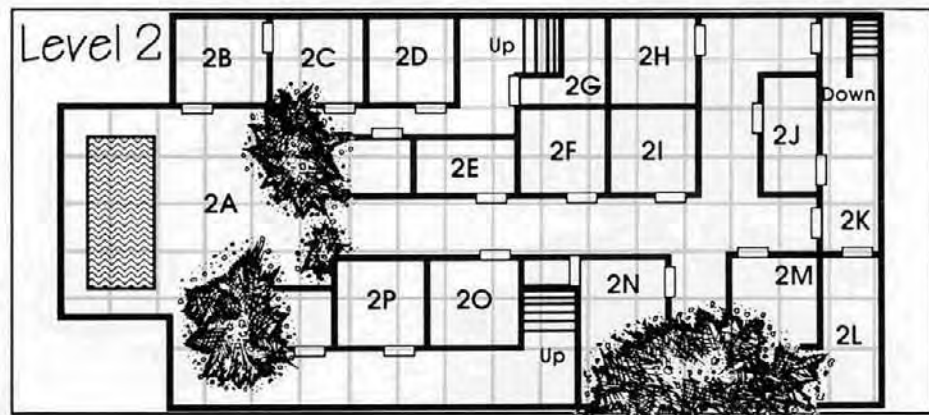
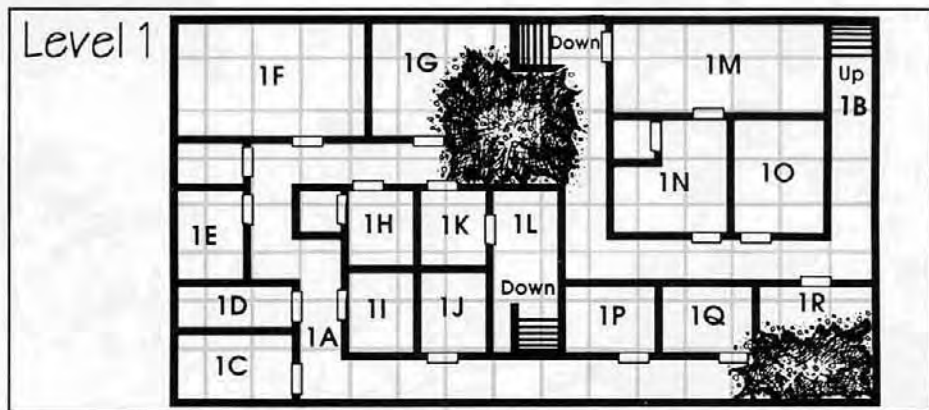
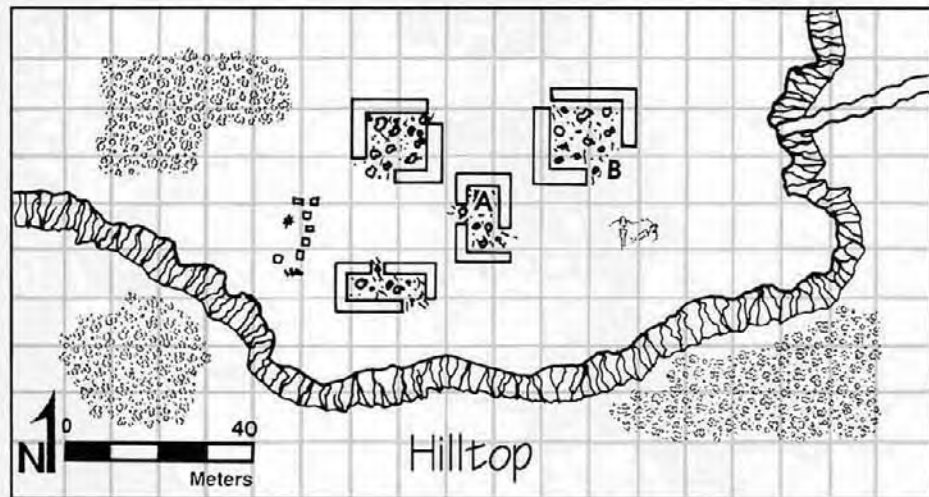
ter (whichever is less), the animal is instantly killed.

If the hit was scored on an area protected by armor, use the remaining damage value of the round. If the firing character's skill level has been reduced by range or a quick shot, use the reduced value. However, if his skill has been increased (due to taking an aimed shot at close range) use the unmodified skill level.

For example, two characters, each with a Small Arms (Rifle) skill of 6, are firing at a tyrannosaurus at close range. Joe has a Mauser bolt-action rifle, while Ed has a Boys antitank rifle (see description below). Joe hits the tyrannosaurus in the head, while Ed hits it in the chest, both potentially fatal wounds. Joe's 8mm Mauser has a damage value of 4, but this is reduced to 2 by the tyrannosaurus' thick skull. Joe must roll less than a 2 (i.e., a 1) to instantly kill the target. Ed's antitank rifle has a damage value of 10, and the tyrannosaurus' chest does nothing to reduce this. Since Ed's Small Arms skill is only 6, however, he must roll less than 6 to drop the dinosaur in its tracks.

A Gun for Dinosaurs

If the adventurers are playing this adventure with **Twilight: 2000** characters, they may find it handy to pack a little extra firepower in the form of one of the larger big game rifles. While some of these are rated in **C & D**, they are not in the **Twilight: 2000** basic game. Ammunition statistics for all these weapons are collected at the end of this section. Ω



Key

- Woods
- Stream
- Cliff
- Ruins
- A, B Entrances to lower levels
- Remnants of camp
- Skeletons

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YELLOW JOURNALIST

Sure I'm proud of what I do! Okay, I print a lot of trash. But have you stopped to wonder why? With the new world order, the news has become more of a business than ever before, and with the corps pumping out their carefully tailored view of reality at noon, six, and ten, there isn't a lot of room left for unbiased reporting anymore.

But some of us still believe in a free press. Only problem is, we're not independently wealthy, so we can't compete head to head for the public's attention. But if we intermix the real news with stories about Hitler's ghost—bingo!—we've got a market. We've gotta make a buck if we're going to stay in business to report what the corps would like to sweep under the rug.

But there's another reason for printing the trash with the truth. Lean a little closer. Have you heard what happened to Dallas' independent, *The Liberty Bell*? That's right—it burned, staff and all. But it wasn't because a gas main blew, like they claim. No, the *Bell* made itself too visible, jammed full of fact, with no camouflage, and somebody had 'em iced. The rest of us have learned. You have to disguise things to keep from drawing the big boys' attention.

With the blunted panic of a dreamer, the man stopped and turned. He was certain he was being followed, but the moon-streaked street stretched emptily behind him, its sidewalks bare. Across the way, a clock tolled the hour from the tower of a marble-fronted building. Moonlight gleamed silver on the words above its door, "Dayton Federal Savings and Loan." Moon-shadows from its columned portico lay still against its stone face.

But on his side of the street, the shadows moved. They twitched and slid from alley to doorway, hollow to hollow. He sensed the movement and spun to confront it, backing warily into the door of a shuttered shop. The shadows froze. A chill settled in his guts.

A mere dozen feet away, the shadow of a trash can seemed to widen as a crouching figure leaned out and raised its head. A pallid face revealed itself to moonlight, eyes glistening feverishly, thin lips stretched in a feral grin. Its teeth seemed unnaturally long. Slowly, the figure crept forward. A score of other shadows did the same.

The man ran, but the air seemed suddenly thick as water. He felt as if he were running in slow motion and the chase seemed to take hours. Behind him the stalkers closed the distance in long, graceful strides. The pool of yellow light under the streetlight down the block seemed to promise safety. If only he could reach the light, the man told himself, perhaps he would be safe. His ragged lungs strained, and his sluggish legs pumped to drive him closer to the light.

The first dark figure caught him and bore him to the ground, the rest close behind. Dozens of rough, long-nailed hands seized his limbs and tore at his clothing. He tried to remain face down, tried to curl up and protect himself, but the hands rolled him over to face his captors and stretched his limbs in four



directions. A fist locked in his hair and pulled his head back painfully, baring his throat. Cold, hard fingers clenched his neck, choking off his breath. He could feel his veins distend with the blocked circulation.

Then sharp teeth tore his throat, splashing blood across the sidewalk. In horror, he listened to the creatures lap it up, as his vision faded.

Hadyn sat up in bed with a cry. Reflexively, he felt his throat: It was whole. Just a dream, then, but so real. He stumbled to the bathroom, switching on the TV along the way. He splashed water on his face, then under his arms and across his chest to wash away his sweat's stink. Then he sat on the edge of the tub until a wave of weakness and dizziness passed.

Padding into the kitchen, he opened the refrigerator and got a can of beer. He drank half of it with the refrigerator door open, enjoying the cool air and the glow of the light. Returning to bed, he sipped the rest of his beer and let the TV's chatter wash over him, soothing his nerves.

He had just begun to doze off when an announcement caught his attention: "This is Mike McDowell for WGIN News, Peoria. Tonight's top stories: Governor Jeakins threatens the CLU from his hospital bed, Chrysler sells downtown St. Louis to Tojicorp, and a Dayton reporter claims blood-sucking cannibals stalk his city. All this, and more, after these messages."

Hadyn stared blankly at the TV for a minute, then he picked up the phone and dialed. "Hunter, this is Hadyn. Yeah, I know what time it is. Listen, if you haven't unpacked yet, don't bother. We've got to go to Dayton, Ohio. Something bad's going down there, maybe worse than Iowa City. I'll be over in half an hour to explain." Numbly, he set the receiver down.

"No rest for the weary," he mumbled.



MYSTIC

You think you know the answers, don't you? The world's a mess, and you're going to do something about it. But if you're going to fight, you have to know who our enemies are, and you don't have the slightest inkling.

You thought the feds were corrupt, but the megacorps have levered them out of power in most places, and now they call the shots. So now the feds look pretty good, and the corps are the baddies.

Or maybe it's all those crazy tin-pot dictators, each one with his finger on one kind of button or another: nuclear, chemical, biological, and some stuff even creepier than that.

Not even *close*. Those are *symptoms*, not the disease.

I can sense the disease, feel it spreading through the arteries and nerve bundles of the world. It's dark, cold, cruel, and absolutely relentless. And it thinks.

It's easier to sense every day. Its sulphur-stinking footsteps are everywhere, and it leaves a trail of horrors behind it a blind man couldn't miss.

Laugh, if you like. If we're going to work together, what you see will make the laughter die in your throat.

I guarantee it.



ASTRONAUT

No, you've never met me before, but I know you. I heard all about that little job you pulled against Aquadyne in Florida.

Easy, easy.

There's no reason for violence—I'm not corporate heat. Believe me, if I were, I wouldn't be talking to you—I'd be shooting at you from a safe distance.

So what do I want? Well, I'd like to join you on your current, um, "mission." You're planning to check out a UFO sighting near Casper, Wyoming, I believe. Well, NASA has a strong interest in this particular report. As a result, I can offer you a great deal of assistance. For one thing, I've got contacts. For another, I've got a trunk full of high-tech equipment. All you have to do is let me come along so I can file a report when it's all over.

Sure, you call the shots. I have no problem with following your lead. You people have proven yourselves, and I'd never think of changing a winning combination.

So what do you say? Is it a deal?

A SHADOW ACROSS THE LAND

In the very near future, chaos reigns. Run-away population growth, diminishing resources, and human apathy have taken their toll. Megacorporations have slipped the reigns of national regulation and wage an economic war. The superpowers have collapsed from inertia and economic decay. Some federal republics still exist—in name. But individual states have stepped forward to fill the vacuum of power, and where they fall short, local governments take up the slack. The result is a political crazy quilt of bizarre laws and practices. What is the custom in one locale may well get you shot in another.

But people still try to piece it all together. Sometimes they're feds. Sometimes they're members of the free press. Sometimes they're concerned citizens with more savvy than most. But always, they have to walk softly, because thousands of people disappear everyday, people who simply know too much. People who know that Earth has been invaded.

Who Are the Invaders?

The first of the invaders arrived millennia ago, and they have been manipulating us ever since, always working behind the scenes to shape our development to their own ends. They depend on our own baser instincts to achieve their goals. And sometimes they take a more active hand. Because of their subtle influence, no event in human history can be called truly ours—none can be viewed as above suspicion of the invaders' taint.

Those who know about the invaders call them the Dark Minions or Darklings. The Darklings are horrific creatures that prey upon our race. They usually work individually, but sometimes cooperate toward a common goal, giving credence to the theory that they labor for even more sinister masters.

The Darklings are the embodiment of our worst nightmares: They are the basis of our legends of vampires, trolls, werewolves, zombies, and demons. They are the fey folk of fairy legend, the evil creatures of all our myths. And they are cruel beyond imagining.

Where Do They Come From?

The Darklings have been with us for so long that it may be pointless to wonder about their origins. They are obviously not native to Earth. Humans share a natural heritage with other Terran creatures. The Darklings share no heritage with us but one: They mirror the darkest reaches of the human soul. But they do not spring from the Earth. Possibly they originate from dimensions beyond those we perceive.

What Do They Want?

The Darklings crave human suffering and amuse themselves with our ruination. Throughout history, they have encouraged cruelty and savagery, ruthlessly stamping out every peaceful civilization and provoking us to war. But to their frustration, our troubles have also prompted in us traits of honor, self-sacrifice, courage, and faithfulness.

To some extent, their frustration is a result of their own cross-purposes. They push us toward a dispassionate, calculating disregard for human life and the animal species that share our world, but they also relish our pain and horror. As a result, they have often engendered cold intellect where they would prefer terror, or caused bonds of human fellowship in suffering where they would prefer our selfish disunity.

How Do We Fight Them?

To battle the Darklings' power, we must recognize the nature of our struggle. First, we must understand that the bulk of humanity does not even know the invaders exist. The majority who do know of them are their servants. That leaves only a scattering of us who actively oppose them. Like the Darklings, then, we must use secrecy as our greatest weapon. Fortunately (in one sense), the world has become a chaotic welter of political states, corporate entities, and citizens' groups struggling for power in an increasingly complex environment. Often, we can strike and then retreat into the chaos before the Darklings respond. For now, though, we cannot hope to defeat the invaders utterly; we can only slow the insidious progress of their plans, fighting to preserve our humanity in the process.



COMPUTER EXPERT

I know it sounds crazy. I was working at my console on a thorny problem, and I just couldn't see a way through it. I was so frustrated it got to the point that I couldn't even hit the right key, so I just leaned back and closed my eyes to relax and unwind. All of a sudden, I was inside the computer. I don't know how else to describe it. I could "feel" the computer's configuration, and I could "see" a bottleneck in the data. My fingers were still on the keyboard, punching away, but my new consciousness was inside the calculus of the problem, walking the endless spirals of those mathematical knots.

Since then, I've experienced the same thing again and again. I've even reached from my console, through the telephone network, and into other computers. And I've found and touched a few others like me out there.

But there's something else. There's another sort of sentience in the network. I don't know what it is, but it isn't human, and I'd swear it isn't computer.

It's something alien.



MERCENARY

Years back I spent my time mostly in Africa, hiring out for brushfire wars, training locals, sometimes smuggling guns. I spent one winter in Cambodia, but I liked southern Africa the best. Sometimes I got money from the US. Other times I lived off the land or taught martial arts in the cities. There were flush times, and there were lean.

These days the brushfire wars are dangerous—the big guys don't watch them as closely and they can get out of hand. So now I do mainly smaller, covert operations, mostly in the States. I work with private eyes, independent reporters, local police, and occasionally even someone from a federal office like the FCC.

Mostly, I work with small arms, sometimes with explosives. But when the feds join in, half the time I end up with some gizmo nobody ever heard of. I'm building quite an arsenal, even if 90% of it is illegal. And some of the things I've ended up dropping have made my hair stand on end.

I'm a mercenary, but that's because I've got to eat. If I had money of my own, I'd do this for free, because there's some pretty awful things out there, and they *need* killing.

DARK CONSPIRACY—THE GAME

Dark Conspiracy is more than just an environment—it's a roleplaying game of the near future. But what sort of game? What do you get for your money?

A Proven System

Dark Conspiracy uses GDW's **Twilight: 2000** second edition game system, so it has a *great* game system going for it—probably the most comprehensive, yet referee-friendly, product on the market. From the career/experience-based character generation system, to the original task resolution procedure, to the rapid-fire combat system, this game has it all.

But not only does the system ensure a solid mechanical framework—it also provides a number of ready-made expansion possibilities. All vehicles, weapons, and equipment from **Twilight: 2000** are usable with **Dark Conspiracy**, so a wide range of support is already available. And if you own those equipment handbooks, you won't have to cough up another \$10 down the road.

Finally, if you already own or play **Twilight: 2000** or **Cadillacs & Dinosaurs**, picking up the new game mechanics will be a breeze—so much so that character cross-overs from those two games or **Merc: 2000** are easy.

A Fascinating Environment

The world of **Dark Conspiracy** is not much different from our own in many ways. It is the near future, but with every negative trend in today's world accelerated and every positive trend reversed. It is a dark world, haunted not only by humanity's greed and cruelty, but also by an ancient, otherworldly horror that threatens humanity's final fall to chaos and despair.

Technology is neutral, providing both sides with new means of meeting their goals. Efficient ultraviolet sun blockers allow vampires (or the creatures people call vampires) to travel abroad during daylight. But backpack UV lasers give vampire hunters a weapon with much more reach than just a clove of garlic or vial of holy water.



Cities are nightmarish warrens of dark, winding alleys and lurking danger. Corporations own large tracts of urban sprawl, the inhabitants supported at subsistence level in return for their voting rights being signed over to the corp. In the center of the largest cities, though, are areas where even the corporations' hired muscle dare not venture.

American industry is devoted almost exclusively to the manufacture of military weaponry, which it exports to the Third World. Almost all consumer goods are imported: those for the dwindling elites from Germany and Japan, those for the teeming, poverty-stricken masses from Russia.

But it is not a world without hope. Evil is powerful, but not supremely so. Human courage and ingenuity still have the strength to turn back the tide of darkness.

Comprehensive Coverage

Detailed background and referee support are included on the level you've come to expect from GDW.

- Ancient myths and legends of supernatural beings are explored.

- Descriptions of the Darkling races provide the basis for many exciting adventures by themselves.

- Character generation provides players with a vast array of careers and backgrounds that will shape their talents and weaknesses—everything from the cultured and educated elites of the big corporations to the destitute, but street-wise, "proles" are possible.

- Unusual equipment and exotic weaponry abound, lavishly illustrated and rated for the **Twilight: 2000** combat system.

- The world of **Dark Conspiracy** is presented in gripping detail: the dark, urban centers of the industrialized world, the nearly deserted countryside covered by sprawling machine-tended corporate farms, the chaotic battlefields of Eastern Europe and the Third World.

It's a bizarre blend of the old and new, of super-science and unspeakable horror. It's a world of exciting challenges, lurking terror, and constant danger.

And it's waiting for you.



PROLE

I've got a really *swell* life.

I get three squares a day, nothing but the best in genuine gourmet Russian Army combat rations, thanks to the generosity of the corp.

I've got my own one-room apartment, six feet by eight feet, fully furnished, again through the generosity of the corp.

I get to sit here all day, watching corporate sponsored TV. No charge.

Once a week, I get to go shopping in the corporate store down the block. I get credits to spend just for sitting here, minding my own business, letting the corp use my proxy vote in the elections.

I can spend the credits on whatever I like, assuming the store's got any left. Mainly I buy clothes. Funny how quickly these jumpsuits wear out when you're just sitting around.

And you guys want to rescue me from this care-free existence?

Okay, you talked me into it.

Lead on.

And now
I have this feeling
I'm being followed.

The roleplaying game of modern horror.
Coming in February 1991 from GDW.



WORLD WAR III: *Twilight: 2000* traces the downward spiral in Europe as regional and ethnic conflict plunge the world into devastation. In the ruins of civilization, the adventures are fast and furious. The prize is survival, and maybe, just maybe, a safe place to spend the night.

CHARACTER GENERATION: *Twilight: 2000* calls for die rolling only for basic attributes (players can opt for a point purchase system instead). Prior career entries are based on minimum attribute scores.

Many Character Types: Character generation includes most nationalities and many nonmilitary backgrounds.

Skills: Skills are based on 1-10 skill levels (instead of the previous 1-100 skill levels). Skills are attribute based; improvement is based on experience. Default skills are available to everyone.

COMBAT: The *Twilight: 2000* advanced combat system is realistic, easy to play, and (above all) fun.

TRAVEL: *Twilight: 2000* covers travel in detail. Rules cover time scales, types of travel available, upkeep, and events. Travel as an introduction to encounters is also described, as are vehicle maintenance, fuel, and repair.

ENCOUNTERS: The new *Twilight* card encounter system emphasizes clearly organized, easy-to-use, short encounters perfect for a night's gaming. Rules cover the *Twilight* card format, creating your own *Twilight* cards, and administering encounters again and again.

Dangerous Environments: The *Twilight* rules cover radiation, disease, and battlefield contaminants.

Twilight Cards: Four typical *Twilight* card adventures are included in the book.

Buildings: Eight typical (and recurring) building interiors are included for use in any number of situations: a bar, subway station, farmhouse, etc.

EQUIPMENT: *Twilight: 2000* has expanded equipment coverage, with a more visual presentation and extensive illustrations. Vehicle statistics are based on up-to-date information and the latest intelligence.

ROLEPLAYING: Referees' responsibilities are spelled out in clear language. More material has been added to help referees in their quest for fast, fun adventures.

Nonplayer characters are carefully defined, with instructions on administering their motivations, describing their characteristics, and playing out their actions.

Tasks have been expanded and clarified.

The **adventures** section gives detailed instructions on how to set them up and describe them.

Plus administering experience, the types of rewards to offer player characters (and how much), and motivating players (and characters) to play out enjoyable adventures.

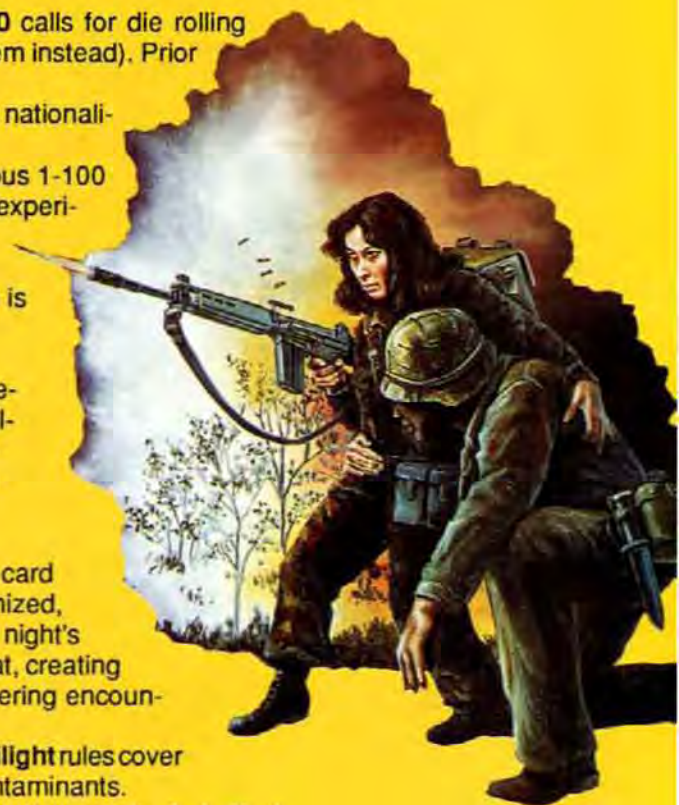
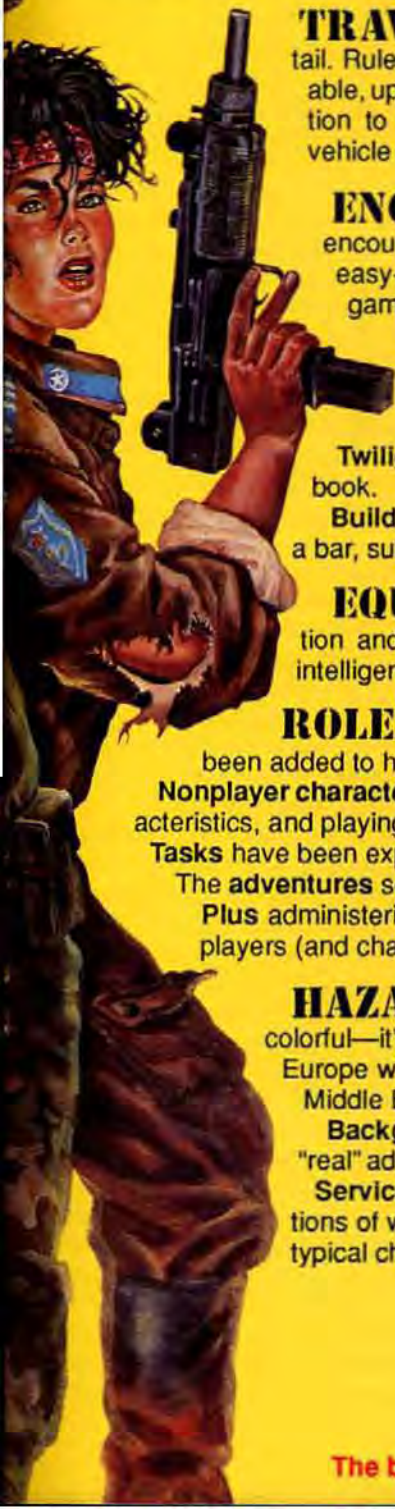
HAZARDOUS ENVIRONMENTS: The *Twilight: 2000* environment has become more colorful—it's a bigger, wilder, more threatening world out there. Referees can set adventures anywhere in Europe with no additional material. Other areas where U.S. troops are stationed are similarly treated: the Middle East, Far East, and the United States.

Background: The opening situation in *Twilight: 2000* covers Poland, with background and details for a "real" adventure with maps, NPCs, the works. It ends up in Krakow, with a lot of detailed coverage of the city.

Service Background: Military service details are included, with discussions of life in the service, definitions of weird terms (like MOPP, MOS, and klick), and explanations of what equipment is like and what a typical character might have experienced.

The New **TWILIGHT: 2000**

The boxed set includes a 288-page basic rule book, 20x28" map of Europe, and blank forms.





Can you unravel the mystery that threatens all of Europe?

Theodore J. Kocot
and H. Michael Lybarger

The characters have received a telegram from the French government, summoning them as experts in their field (at least one adventurer should be a scientist or inventor with magnetic or electronic skills). They are informed that tickets to Tangiers are waiting for them at Portsmouth, and that they are urgently needed to solve a mystery which threatens all of Europe!

After a relatively uneventful trip, they will be met by Lieutenant Guy d'Allard of the French Foreign Legion. After they reach his office, Lt. d'Allard will explain to the characters that two weeks ago a British aerial gunboat was destroyed in Cairo. Five days later a powerful explosion rocked Alexandria destroying the British aerial mail ship *Transitory*.

"A foreign legion officer was in Alexandria at the time, and he recovered these items," Lt. d'Allard explains. He shows the characters a piece of wood and a brass uniform button. "As you can see, these items have been affected quite oddly. The wood is teak, part of the *Transitory's* deck, yet it is now flexible and stretchy, like India rubber. And the brass button," he illustrates with his steel knife, "is now magnetic—a most unusual condition for brass."

Next Lt. d'Allard shows the characters a map and tells them that four days ago a French gunboat, the *Hallebarde*, and its 20-man crew disappeared in Southeast Algeria—uncomfortably near the border of the Mahdist Empire. "It is within the realm of possibility that the *Hallebarde* suffered a fate similar to that of the British vessels. If that is so, scientists such as yourselves will be invaluable to our investigation. The government of France needs your help." If the chance to save all of Europe is not enough, the lieutenant can offer the PCs a cash reward of £500, along with the thanks of the French government. How can they refuse?

Having offered their assistance, the characters will be assigned to accompany a discrete armed force into Southeast Algeria, following the *Hallebarde's* assigned patrol route. Their flyer, the

steam launch *Marie*, is one of the few liftwood vessels crewed by the legion in Africa. It is, of course, considerably smaller than the *Hallebarde*, a *Gloire*-class vessel, but it can comfortably accommodate the characters and a force of 10 legionnaires.

A GRISLY ENCOUNTER

The expedition will follow the route the earlier flyer took, up to a point near the *Hallebarde's* last reported position. After that, the commander of the legion detachment, Sergeant Blaeu, will suggest that for safety's sake they continue on foot.

The land approach will be uneventful, but soon the characters will spot carrion birds circling a short distance ahead—an ominous sign.

Crash Site: The legionnaires hasten forward and soon find the wreckage of the *Hallebarde*. The iron hull has been crumpled by some fierce pressure, as if made of paper, and the teakwood decks have been splintered. Fragments of liftwood rollers are scattered for hundreds of yards around the wreck.

The carrion birds take flight when the characters' party arrives, leaving the remains of the crew. There seem to be 20 or so bodies. Most obviously died from injuries suffered during the crash, but several show bullet and spear wounds—and even more shocking, two have been tied to stakes, tortured to death and then left for the birds.

If the PCs search the wreckage, they will find that the liftwood panels have no lift—they have decayed utterly. Buttons and other brass objects show strong magnetism, and the wooden parts of the flier are soft as butter. Even the fragments of glass have been strangely altered, becoming milky and frosted. Within the twisted hulk, the characters will make their most important discovery: a delirious French airman. If they give him water and let him rest for a bit, he will haltingly tell them about the crash.

The Airman's Story: "First the compass became deranged. The captain was not sure that we were on course. Then we lost trim control and were hit by a powerful blast of air. It was icy cold, yet it burned! The air crackled with green fire and then the boiler exploded. Only seven of us survived the crash. We were sorting through the wreckage, getting ready to bury the dead and set up some sort of shelter, when a band of mounted Arabs swept down upon us. I took cover inside the wreck, but most of the others were shot or cut down in that first few seconds of the attack. The Arabs

strung up Commander Beauxiche and Phillippe, one of the ship's engineers. The Arabs tortured them, but I couldn't hear what they were saying. Phillippe spit in the Arab leader's face. The Arab started hacking him with his sword. Commander Beauxiche never said a word to any of them. Finally, they cut his throat."

The telling of this story has exhausted the man, and he will rapidly lapse into unconsciousness. If the PCs persist in their questioning he can tell them only that the Arabs rode off toward the south, leaving the dead for the vultures.

Sgt. Blaeu will tell two of his men to take the injured airman back to the *Marie* and let him rest.

The Band Returns: If the characters spend much time near the crash site, they will spot (or possibly be spotted by) a mounted band of tribesmen, bearing a black Mahdist banner. The player characters will either be forced to evade capture, or they will have the opportunity to surreptitiously follow the troop.

If the party chooses to covertly follow the band, at the end of the day, the group will enter into a bowl-shaped valley from which four small tower tops emerge. When the characters reach the edge, they will see that these hastily constructed minarets, little more than poles with crow's nests and rope ladders, surround a huge obsidian-like pyramid which glows with a faint, green light. They also see a ramp leading up to an oval doorway in the pyramid's side.

What the characters also notice is that there are about 75 soldiers, both Sudanese Jahadia and Fuzzy-Wuzzies, camped in the valley. Most of them seem to be ill. Many look malnourished, and some have blisters, scabs, or patches where their hair has fallen out. Even so, they are a considerably stronger force than the characters' squad of legionnaires.

GETTING INTO THE PYRAMID

If the characters and their foreign legion allies have arrived at the Black Pyramid unnoticed, they may attempt to investigate "undercover." Men enter and leave the camp regularly to answer calls of nature, tend the camels, etc. Stealthy characters might be able to ambush a lone Mahdist and take his *djellabah* and turban as a disguise.

If the characters have been captured by the Mahdists, they will find themselves under guard in the center of the camp, awaiting an audience with "He Who Smites the Enemies of Allah" a.k.a. Rahman abd Fashood, who will grace them with a tour of his temple before their execution.

If the characters can think of no other course of action, Sgt. Blaeu will suggest that they sneak into the pyramid, and after giving them some time to explore, the legionnaires will act as a diversion, allowing the player characters to escape. The legionnaires, utilizing the *Marie*, could attack the camp as a distraction, then try to draw off as many of the tribesmen as possible.

INSIDE THE BLACK PYRAMID

When the characters enter the pyramid, they will see that it is in fact an octohedron which has been half buried. Ahead of them is a huge, black dodecahedron emanating the same green light as the peak of the pyramid. From this dodecahedron a huge rod extends both up and down as far as can be seen in the web of cables and machinery which fills most of the space inside the structure. If the characters succeed at a Moderate Observation roll, they will notice that there are in fact two different sets of feeds coming from this "cell." One set is made of a slick, black material, while the other is made of more earthly substances. The short walkway the PCs entered on leads to a spiral ramp going both up and down around the huge column.

Going Down: If the characters descend the ramp, they will find that the lower portion of the chamber is filled with a jungle of hydraulics which disappear into a buttress on each wall. The central column is dotted with gauges lettered in a strange language and

frosted glass windows which are dark. Below this is a room in which the column ends. A ladder leads down to a catwalk which surrounds a huge copper coil wound around a six-foot, black spindle which glows with the same green light as the center cell. Below the spindle is a huge crystal which also emits the green glow. A scientist character may want to take a sample of the crystal. If so, a Moderate Dexterity roll is required to climb down to the crystal.

Going Up: The ramp going up has several of the recently installed cables haphazardly wound around its guard rail. The level above the entrance is filled with cabinets and counters. It has many strange devices in it, some of which anyone with any scientific skill would recognize as Victorian electrical equipment, and others which defy description. Reams of paper covered with mathematic equations and sprawling notations in Arabic litter the room. Characters with skill in Science (Physics) or Linguistics (Arabic) should be allowed a Moderate Observation roll to determine that the papers have something to do with magnetism and its effects on ether. If the characters search thoroughly, they will find a space suit which would scarcely fit a human and some odd tools.

Above the cabinet-filled room is a pyramidal chamber containing another coil, spindle, and crystal, which hangs above the spindle. Three chairs also occupy the room. Assuming that Fashood is not



SGT. BLAEU (TRAINED NPC)

Attributes	Skills
Str: 4	Fisticuffs 3, Throwing 2, Close Combat 4
Agil: 5	Stealth 4, Marksmanship 3 (rifle)
End: 6	Wilderness Travel 5 (foraging, mapping), Fieldcraft 3
Int: 3	Observation 2
Chr: 1	Linguistics 1 (English)
Soc: 2	Riding 1 (camel), Leadership 2

Motives: Steady, Loyal (to the legion).

Appearance: The sergeant is a compact, sturdy man, with dark brown hair and skin weathered by his years in Algeria. He maintains a pencil-thin moustache, which is always carefully groomed and waxed. His native language is French. He carries a bolt-action rifle.

leading the characters on a tour of his pyramid, he will be sleeping restlessly in the center chair. Flanking him in the other seats are two misshapen skeletons. Their heads are oversized in comparison to the childlike proportion of their bodies. Fashood is wearing a turban and has somehow managed to force himself into one of the odd space suits. The skeletons are dressed in similar suits and have been adorned with turbans and scimitars.

Surrounding the black shaft are several tripods atop which are



RAHMAN ABD FASHOOD, PH. D. (EXPERIENCED NPC)

Doctor Rahman spent much of his youth as a student in Europe, ultimately obtaining his Ph. D. in physics while also pursuing studies in chemistry and engineering. He never uses the infidel "doctor" as part of his name and is angered by its use.

Toward the end of his studies, Rahman developed a fierce hatred of all things European and felt that he must do something to end the "rape" of his homeland. To this end, he returned to Egypt and soon became a loyal servant of the Mahdi, building explosives and other complex weapons for use against the British and French in the Sudan. When the pyramid was discovered, he was the obvious choice to investigate it. His anger became mania after the many weeks he spent in the alien vessel's strange radiations.

His native language is Arabic.

Attributes	Skills
Str: 5	Fisticuffs 4, Throwing 3, Close Combat 2 (edged weapon)
Agl: 4	Stealth 3
End: 2	Wilderness Travel 1 (foraging)
Int: 6	Observation 5, Science 5 (physics, chemistry, geology), Engineering 1 (explosives), Mechanics 2 (electricity, machinist)
Chr: 3	Eloquence 2, Linguistics 2 (English, French)
Soc: 1	Leadership 1

Motives: Mad, Ruthless, Hatred (Europeans).

Appearance: Fashood is tall, cadaverously thin, and slightly stooped, as if from long hours over a lab bench. His hair is dark, and his beard is a tangled rat's nest, uncombed and unwashed. His eyes have a feral gleam, peering out from his swarthy face. He will be wearing a combination of traditional Arab dress and alien clothing.

mounted dark metal rods wrapped in innumerable layers of fine wire. There are several calipers, plumb-bobs and other measuring devices attached to these subsidiary coils. A map of Egypt and the Sudan, along with reams of calculations, sit on a small table. Standing prominently alongside this is a large globe with map pins embedded in various European locations.

SECRETS OF THE BLACK PYRAMID

What the characters have run across is a spacecraft built by the inhabitants of Vulcan before the planet exploded. It is propelled by directed magnetic force and powered by the atom! The ship has been discovered by Rahman abd Fashood, a thoroughly mad Arab, who is focusing the power of the ship's drive to hammer his targets with currents of ether. He is using electromagnets to aim his blasts; the long delay between attacks is due to the incredible difficulty in targeting these forces. Days of complex calculations and adjustments are required to aim the magnetic fields, and the more distant the target, the more involved the calculations become.

Even when correctly aimed, such an attack will fall on whatever object is highest in the air over the target point: a flyer, a tower, or perhaps even a flock of birds. The attack on the *Hallebarde* came only after careful analysis of the flyer's course and speed. Fashood realized that the French survey ship's course would take it almost directly over his pyramid—he had to attack the vessel before it discovered his secret. He aimed his weapon, which he calls the Fist of Allah, at a point in the desert near which the *Hallebarde* would have to pass and sent troops to monitor the vessel's progress. A single throw of a switch sent the flyer's crewmembers to their deaths.

THE MADMAN AWAKES

The moment the characters touch any of the equipment or the controls in the chamber, Fashood will awaken, the gleam of madness in his eyes. "Infidels! Interlopers! Stay away from that which is sacred to Allah! You know not what forces you tamper with, here within my sanctum!" With those words, he will grab at one of the scimitars borne by his long-dead "companions" and brandish it at the PCs. "For years have I searched—for years I have toiled in the universities of your infidel nations. I sought power—a force with which to strike back at Britain and the scourge of her imperialism. Fool that I was, I knew not that such a power lay here, in my own land! The Fist of Allah, to strike from the heart of the desert, and drive Britain to its knees!"

If the characters do nothing, Fashood will regale them with the exact workings of his masterpiece, going into loving detail as he describes its ability to strike at a vast distance using the ether as a giant fist. He will display his preliminary calculations for targets within Britain, the first one being Buckingham Palace!

Fashood, armed only with his scimitar, seems inattentive to the actions of the characters as he rants. It would seem easy enough for one (or more) of the PCs to attempt to jump and disarm him. Undoubtedly, a struggle will ensue, a fistfight at first, but perhaps escalating to the use of swords or even guns. Fashood will attempt, with the strength of madness, to wrest a firearm from one of the characters.

No matter what the outcome of the fight, a control panel will be damaged. A character or Fashood might slip or be knocked back, catching himself on a prominent lever, or more likely, a bullet fired during the struggle will strike a panel, sending sparks flying—you get the picture.

Instantly, the console will begin to make sounds, speaking an unknown language! A few brief sentences will be uttered, along with a number of distinct beeps and clicks. Various creaking noises will be heard from below, as if ancient machines were haltingly coming to life.

A Magnetic Encounter: After a few turns of this, the green glow which illuminates the pyramid will begin to brighten, and any ferrous metal the characters have will be drawn toward the black drive

spindle in the center of the room. At first this will be a gentle pull, but after three combat turns pass, the effect will increase, and anyone standing between Fashood's tools and the spindle will be hit by one to three of the flying implements. (The tools will cause one wound each if they hit. The characters should make a Moderate Agility roll to avoid them. The Dodge combat maneuver is not applicable due to the two-way pull involved in this action.)

At this point the pull will make armed combat almost impossible. After two more combat turns, Fashood's scimitar will pull him across the room and become thoroughly stuck to the spindle. Any weapons held by the characters will do likewise.

After two further turns, buttons and belt buckles will be affected similarly, pinning any characters who are wearing some sort of metal to the column. They must make a Difficult Strength roll to tear these pieces free from their garments. (As comic relief, the referee may require gentlemen to remove their belts to escape. If a female is present, they must be careful to hold up their pants during their departure.)

Countdown to Launch: After three more turns the computer will begin to make distinct, regularly spaced sounds. (The referee should go to no efforts to disguise the fact that this is indeed a countdown. Slowly reciting single words of gibberish at even intervals should make all the PCs aware of the danger they are in. The characters will have plenty of time to make good their escape, unless they ignore these warning signs.)

Suddenly, the deck will tilt wildly, causing even more confusion. Observers outside will see four hydraulic legs extend from the base of the pyramid. The legs will begin to move slowly as the vessel clammers up out of the sand and takes a squatting stance on the surface.

EXIT, STAGE LEFT

By now the characters should have realized that the control room is no longer a healthy place to be. Even through the haze of his insanity, Rahman abd Fashood will also realize this and attempt to make a break for the entryway. (If the characters can find no better

reason to leave the pyramid, chasing Fashood will certainly save their lives at this point.)

When the characters begin to descend the spiral ramp, they will see that additional pipes and wires have sprouted from the dodecahedron at the core of the ship. Broken wires—Fashood's additions to the ancient system—are strewn across the ramp. Characters should make a quick Dexterity check to avoid a tumble into the shifting bowels of the vessel. (Such a tumble will cause two wounds to anyone unfortunate enough to be thus precipitated. Saving rolls are made normally.)

A fall into the bowels of the ship is an ideal way for the referee to dispose of Rahman abd Fashood, especially if he prefers Rahman's uncertain demise rather than his capture.

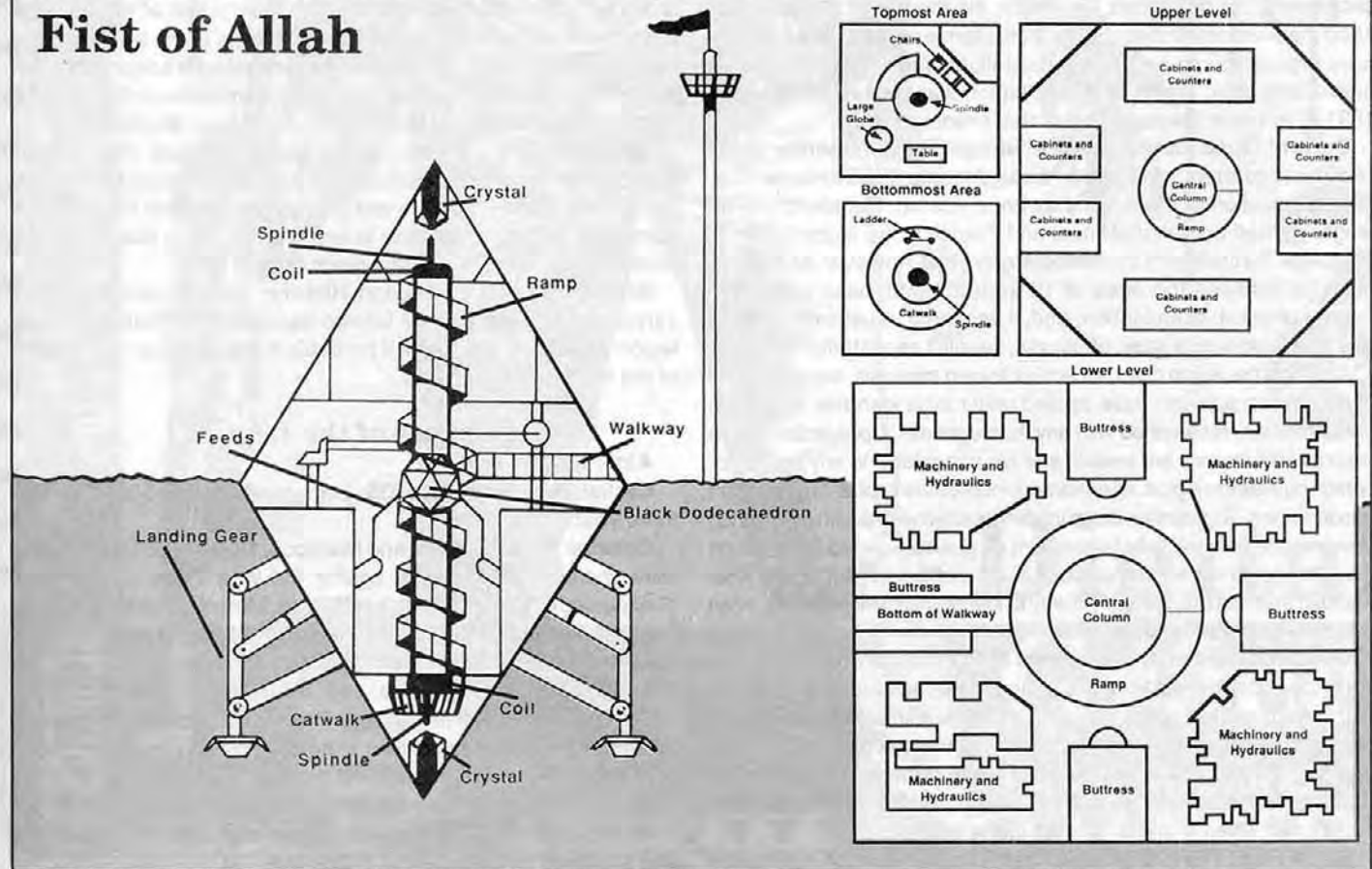
Moments after the characters leave the pyramid, the green glow will intensify to an unearthly brightness. A column of green light will descend from the skies down upon the vessel, crackling with ethereal lightning. With a loud humming whine, the vessel will begin to rise. It moves slowly at first, as the legs retract, but accelerates with every inch of altitude gained. Shortly, it is out of sight, leaving only a single, distant thunderclap, high above, to mark its passing.

IN THE WAKE OF THE STORM

Should the characters fail to leave the ship, they will quickly find themselves beyond the bounds of Earth's gravity, on a course into the unknown. At this point, it is up to the referee's individual preferences to select their destination. Perhaps they will adventure on another world or be marooned on a decrepit Vulcan base, now a squalid, hollowed-out asteroid with only enough air, fungus and rodents for the PCs to eke out a pale existence as they devise a way



Fist of Allah



to signal for rescue.

Round 'Em Up: It should be no difficulty for the legionnaires to round up the now-disillusioned Mahdist forces, especially in their weakened condition (minus superweapon and fanatic leader). In any case, many of the Fuzzy-Wuzzy troops will have headed for the high desert the minute the pyramid rises from the sand. They will no doubt carry tales of the PCs' prowess back to their chieftains—and the Mahdi.

Rewards: Lt. d'Allard will be delighted to hear of the end of the threat and will bestow upon the PCs a cash reward of £500, along with the thanks of the French government. The characters may have earned renown points for their Heroic Acts or Service to the Crown. Any individual character who earns more than four renown points for this adventure stands a chance of being knighted for his exemplary deeds.

Players who participated in Close Combat will earn one Close Combat experience point. All players who survive the adventure will earn at least one general experience point (more at the referee's discretion or for superlative roleplaying).

It is possible to play out the battle between the Mahdist forces and the foreign legionnaires using the **Soldier's Companion** miniatures rules. All of the forces are detailed in the sourcebook section. Fashood's troops are at a -1 morale due to their poor health.

THE FRENCH FOREIGN LEGION

No military unit possesses the aura and mystique of the French Foreign Legion. The fame of these men comes less from what they have done than from who they are. The legion's honors were not won in glorious battles, but in a thousand nameless fights. Their commanders have seldom become legendary, and the individual soldiers, never—but as a whole, the foreign legion has earned its place in history.

The legion was created in 1831 by King Louis Philippe for service outside France. It was his intention that the legion draw foreign mercenaries into French service. Frenchmen were forbidden to join its ranks, but many legionnaires have claimed false nationalities to circumvent this regulation. Originally, the force was composed of 4000 men—mostly Poles, Spaniards, Germans, and Italians. They were organized into nationalistic battalions, each speaking its own native language. In this form, the legion was posted to Algeria in 1831 to assist in the conquest of that French colony.

Current Organization and Enlistment Requirements: In AD 1889 headquarters is in Sidi bel Abbes, Algeria. Since its beginning, the organization of the legion has been altered. Battalions are no longer formed on national lines, and French is the legion's official language. Recruitment still remains very strict, however. Applicants must be between the ages of 18 and 40, must pass a rigorous military physical examination, and, if accepted, must serve for five years. A legionnaire may, of course, reenlist repeatedly.

Although the legion does not accept known criminals, many persons of dubious background have applied under false identities. A recruit's story is seldom researched with any thoroughness. Upon enlistment, a legionnaire's records are sealed, and are unavailable to any agency or person outside the legion. All enlistment records are kept at foreign legion headquarters. To maintain this confidential relationship with the French government many recruits take a *nom de guerre*—an alias—by which they are known to their companions and the officers in the legion. After a soldier musters out, there is no way to identify his civilian identity, even with his individual *nom de guerre*.

Uniform: The traditional uniform of the French Foreign Legion consists of baggy red trousers, a high-collared blue coat, and the legion trademark, a white kepi with a cloth sunshield over the neck. The legion insignia is a red grenade, spouting seven flames. More recently, the legion has adopted the white trousers worn by other French infantry units. Akhaki or camel-colored jacket is sometimes substituted when a unit is serving in the tropics.

Battle Flag: The foreign legion battle flag is based on the French

tricolor, on which is superimposed a globe, labeled "France," and the legend, "The King of the French to the foreign legion." Esprit de corps is very high in the legion, and the battle flag is accorded great respect and reverence.

The legion's spirit and morale can best be illustrated by the events of the Battle of Camerone. While fighting in support of the Mexican Emperor Maximilian, a handful of legionnaires withstood the charges of 2000 enemy soldiers. Refusing to surrender, the last six legionnaires made a final bayonet charge. Only three were taken alive. The legion celebrates April 30, the anniversary of the battle, as a time of remembrance. It is without a doubt the most sacred date to the French Foreign Legion.

The Legion in Space: 1889

Any player character who wishes to have a career in the foreign legion must first pass the physical examination. In practice, this means he must have Str 2+, Agl 2+, and End 4+. Social Level is, of course, not considered.

Skills: The foreign legion provides the following skills to all recruits: Close Combat 2, Fieldcraft 2, Marksmanship 1 (rifle), Linguistics 1 (French), Wilderness Travel 1 (foraging). Eloquence or Crime (any type) are appropriate additional skills for a character who is running from a "past." (Eloquence could be, in this case, synonymous with "con artistry.")

Second Career: Alternately, the foreign legion makes a good second career for anyone whose first career was a criminal one. Of course, the past a given character may be running from need not have been actively illegal. Broken hearts, failed love affairs, and accusations of cowardice have all caused men to join the French Foreign Legion.

Length of Term: A character with one career in the legion will have served one or perhaps two five-year enlistments. A character with two careers in the legion will have spent at least 15 years with the corps.

Rank: A character's rank in the foreign legion will depend upon his years of service, assuming general competence. A player may of course choose a rank lower than that listed, if he wishes. This may represent a character with a discipline problem, or simply a lack of motivation. A character who has served more than five years in the legion may be ranked a corporal. A 10-year man may be ranked a sergeant. Fifteen years service allows a maximum rank of sergeant-major. A character who has the skill Linguistics 3+ (French) may have been an officer if he has served more than one term in the legion. The lowest officer rank is lieutenant. Promotion to captain follows at the end of 10 years of service, and promotion to major at the end of 20 years of service. Ranks higher than major are never available to legionnaires, being filled by French citizen-officers from the regular French Army.

Knowledge and Campaign History: Any character who has served terms of duty in the foreign legion will be familiar with the legion's battle history, and will probably have served in one or more of the following campaigns.

Battles of the Legion

Algeria, 1831

Carlist War in Spain, 1835: Legion reduced to 500 men after three years of fighting.

Colonial Wars in Algeria and Morocco, 1835-1885: These actions were sporadic, being mainly against the local tribes. Combat was interspersed with bouts of construction work. Most of the early, European-style buildings in North Africa were built by the foreign legion.

Crimean War, 1854: Two regiments. 450 men killed.

Italy, 1859: Two regiments. 150 men killed.

Mexico, 1863: 470 men killed. This was Napoleon III's attempt to aid the Emperor Maximilian in holding Mexico.

France, 1870: Serving against the German invasion.

Indochina, 1885: Four battalions. These troops served to put down local uprisings. They were reorganized as the 5th Regiment and stationed permanently in Indochina. Ω



Continued on page 57.

Challenge 47 55



In 2020, Earth was devastated by geological catastrophe, and billions died. The only survivors were the handfuls in the shelters. They came out 450 years later to a radically altered world—an impossible world populated by dinosaurs and the ruins of past civilizations.

This is the Xenozoic era. Here a few brave men and women struggle to reclaim the Earth. They explore the ruins of now-ancient 20th-century civilization, and like people since the beginning of

time, they fight among themselves.

Cadillacs & Dinosaurs, the roleplaying game, is based on *Xenozoic Tales*, the acclaimed comic series by Mark Schultz. Complete rules (based on GDW's award-winning **Twilight: 2000** game system) detail character generation, combat, exploration, equipment, and adventuring in this fascinating future world.

144-page trade paperback. Fully illustrated with Mark Schultz's art. Game rules by Frank Chadwick. GDW: 3000. \$18. Available in November 1990.

Given that I didn't know where I was when I woke up, I figured that still having my clothes on was a plus. I mean, I can remember similar incidents when I thought otherwise, but I hadn't been tied up in those situations. I also didn't have a kid sitting on the end of the bed pointing a pistol with a bowling-ball bore at me.

"Kyrie, he's awake." The little albino showed me his teeth in a feral grin and held the heavy revolver with pale, unwavering hands. "Do anything, Kies, and the last thing going through your mind will be a bullet."

Great, I thought. *I'm being held by some psycho punk who's been downloading intimidation lessons from Kid Stealth.* "No problem, ace."

I took a moment or two to assess my situation. Because of the thick, blue and red Indian blanket drawn up to my neck, I couldn't see my hands, but it felt like the kid had used hawser to bind my wrists together. The cable had been knotted tight, but my hands weren't tied behind my back. Whatever spark of hope that little gift inspired died in the railroad tunnel at the end of the gun barrel staring at me.

The old, metal-frame bed had been painted enough times for me to see a rainbow of colors where chips cut through to bare metal. Off to my left, just on the far side of the doorway, I saw a table and two chairs. My leather jacket hung over the back of one of the chairs, and my shoulder holster, complete with pistol, lay on the table. The room, from the cobwebs in the corners to the cracks in the plaster, had seen better days, but it was still habitable. The bedding looked fairly clean, but the scent told me it had been a week or two since it had been washed.

Using my elbows and heels, I slowly pushed myself back and up into a sitting position. I clamped down on the blanket with my chin, pulling it up with me. Bending my knees and digging my heels in, I popped the blanket up into a little tent and watched the albino over the artificial horizon stretched between my knees.

"So tell me, do you have a 'preferred guest rate,' or am I being soaked for full fare during my impromptu stay?"

The albino's pink eyes watched me without blinking. His white hair had been shaved into a mohawk and stiffened with glue into a bristle of porcupine quills. Aside from the reddish cast to his eyes, the only color on him came from the dirt beneath his fingernails and the little creases at the corner of his thin-lipped mouth. His jaw showed white wisps of beard-to-come. His Mercurial T-shirt and synthetic pants matched the dingy gray walls in hue.

Before he could answer, or pull the trigger, a second person entered the room. She was a pretty little Elf, if a tad on the lean side. She had fire in her dark eyes, though she seemed to take care to hide it when she looked at the albino. She wore her black hair very short in a boyish cut. That, and her slender figure, made it easily possible for her to pass as a young man—a wise thing to do if, as was my guess, we were in the Barrens and this was where they lived. She wore mostly synthleather—standard for the Sprawl—though hers was of browns and tans that would have seemed more appropriate out in the Tir.

"How are you feeling?" Kyrie leaned on the foot of the bed as she asked the question. "Are you hurt?"

I shook my head casually. "Tongue feels thick. I could use some water."

She turned to leave, but the gunboy snarled at her. "Overruled. You'll get water when I say you get water."

"Albion, he's not an enemy."

"He's not a guest either, Kyrie. He's a hostage." Albion locked his serpent-stare on me again. "You're Wolfgang Kies, right?"

My eyes narrowed. "Cut to the chase."

"My game, my rules, my speed."

"Okay, if that's the way it is. Yes, I'm Wolfgang Kies." I pulled my head up and back, pressing it against the wall behind me. "Next?"

"You work for Dr. Richard Raven, right?"

That question, combined with calling me a hostage earlier, started alarm bells going off in my head. I knew Etienne LaPlante, a Seattle kingpin, had a standing reward for delivering Raven's head in a sack. I didn't think these kids were setting a trap for Raven with me as bait, but anything was possible in the Sprawl. As desperation finds plenty of prey

in the Barrens, that might be exactly what was happening.

"Yeah, I work for Raven."

Immediately Kyrie's expression brightened. Albion remained

stonefaced, but tipped the pistol up toward the ceiling. Some of my anxiety drained off as the pistol ceased its violation of my personal space, but I knew lots more was going on than I could read.

Two more kids entered the room, and the second I laid eyes on the smallest of them, how I got involved in this mess came flooding back with a clarity that caused me to blush. I'd just come out of Kell's over between 1st and 2nd, down by the Market. I'd been drinking a bit, but not too much because I was more interested in watching the Seadogs in their fight for the pennant than I was in getting drunk. Jimmy Mackelroy salted the game away with a three-run homer in the 9th, so I left and headed out toward Stewart to get my Fenris.

I should have known better, but in the alley between Kell's and the Gravity Bar I heard someone crying. I pulled my Beretta Viper-14 and thumbed the safety off, then glanced around the corner of the alley. Aside from two rats perched on the rim of a dumpster and the usual accumulation of trash, I saw nothing out of the ordinary except a tiny humanoid form.

Its head came up, and I saw the most cherubic little face I'd ever laid eyes on. Because of the multiple layers of clothing swathing the child, I couldn't tell if it was a boy or girl. It took one bold step toward me with its left foot, then hesitated and let its right leg drag shyly in behind the left. With the length of cuff overhanging its right hand, the child swiped at the tears on its grimy face, then smiled at me.

"Ah you Wolfgang Kies?" it asked in an innocent, mush-mouth voice.

I slipped my Viper back into the shoulder holster I wore beneath my leather jacket. "Yes." I stepped into the alley and approached the child.

"And do you wook for Docto Waven?" it followed up in a voice rising with expectation.

I dropped to one knee and held out my left hand. "Yes. Are you lost?"

It smiled as agelessly as a Buddha. "No." It held its hands out to me. As it did so, an aerosol neurotoxin mist sprayed out from its left sleeve, while the little figure clapped its right sleeve over its own nose and mouth.

The spray stung my eyes, but before I could even think of running, I'd pulled enough in through my open mouth to drop me on my tail. I coughed weakly, then lay back. As consciousness drained from me, I remember praying one thing over and over: "Please, God, if I have to die, don't let Stealth find out how I got it."

The little boy disengaged his hand from that of the fourth member of the youth assembly and approached the head of the bed. "Ah you okay?"

The hurt and fear in his quiet voice prompted an instant smile of reassurance on my part. "I'm fine."

The albino looked over at the other girl in the room. "Sine, get Cooper away from him. You're supposed to be watching out front."

The blond flipped her long hair back from her shoulder with a contemptuous toss of her head. "Get real, chummer. These are the Barrens. There's nothing out there, and no one will find us here. No one but that damned preacherman." Still, despite her defiance, she held her hand out to the little boy, and Cooper took it. His other hand came up to his face, and his thumb disappeared within his mouth.

"Okay, chummers, what's the action?" I put a nasty face on and centered my attention on Kyrie. "You tagged me good, and you've got me here. You want something, that's obvious, or I'd have woken up dead. Slot and run—I've got places to go and people to see."

"You're going nowhere, Kies." Albion began to get antsy with the gun again. "We want Raven to do a job for us."

I shook my head. "Is that all? A job? Fine, let me call him."

"Nope." Albion dropped the gun down toward me and sighted a pink eye down the barrel. "He won't do it on your say-so. He's legal—he's got a System Identification Number. We question authority and



don't trust anyone with a SIN. The only way Raven will work for us is if your life is on the line."

"That six-shooter has more bullets than you have brain cells." I looked at Kyrie. "You're an Elf, you could have gotten word to Raven through the Tir, and he'd have helped. You must have thought of that."

"Overruled," snarled Albion.

I felt my anger rising, and along with it came the howl of a wolf in the back of my mind. "Overruled, Albion, because that was a bad idea or because you couldn't control the situation then?"

"Overruled because we don't trust anyone legal." He opened his arms wide. "We're a family. We do for each other and can trust each other because we're all alike. You get a SIN, and all sorts of laws start kicking in. Folks get worried about covering themselves in legalities. Not us. We just want to be left alone, and that's what we want Raven to ensure."

"Okay, if that's what you want." I snorted a little laugh. "I think you're making a mistake, however. I think Doc would prefer working with folks who accepted his help openly, not coerced it."

"My rules, remember?"

"You might want to reconsider." I pulled my hands from beneath the blanket and shook the frayed hawser from them. "I think he'd frown on having me tied up." Looking past Kyrie and Sine, I smiled. "Isn't that true, Doc?"

The kids spun toward the doorway faster than a pedestrian hit by a Porsche Mako going full open. Albion's jaw hit the floor, followed a second later by his pistol. Kyrie leaned back against the bed's frame. Sine sat down hard in the chair with my jacket on it, while Cooper just stared wide-eyed and continued to suck his thumb.

Doctor Richard Raven more than filled the doorway. Tall, even for an Elf, his head rose at least 15 centimeters above the top of the door. His broad shoulders tapered down into a narrow waist, slender hips and powerful legs in a build more typical of humans than Elves. His coppery skin, high cheekbones and long, black hair bespoke an American Indian heritage, though his white shirt and khaki canvas slacks were the latest in corporate casual.

Somehow, though, his size and mixed Amerind/Elven racial characteristics were not what surprised them. His eyes held their attention. Red and blue ribbons of color wove through their black depths in an aurora-like display. Half-terrifying and 100% fascinating, his gaze swept over them, then he nodded solemnly.

"I thank you for finding and taking care of my friend. When the emergency locator beacon built into his belt buckle was activated, I became understandably concerned."

I kicked the blanket off and brushed the remnants of the rope from the sharpened edge of the buckle. "Did that thing get activated again?" I shrugged. "Just as well, I suppose, Doc, because these kids want to hire you to do a job for them."

Raven smiled easily as I crawled out of bed and slipped my holster back on. He looked over at Albion. "How is it that I can repay your kindness to Wolf?"

Albion swallowed hard, bringing a little joy to my heart. "You know Reverend Dr. Lawrence Roberts?"

I tugged my jacket from beneath Sine and recalled her earlier remark. "The television preacher?"

Albion nodded. "The same." He looked around, silently polling Kyrie and Sine. They gave him nods. "We want you to kill him."

II

As I headed my Fenris sports coupe out from the garage beneath Raven's headquarters, I found myself silently agreeing with Kyrie's final comment about Rev. Roberts—it didn't make any sense. What the kids had told us defied logic in the way only insanity or divine inspiration can possibly manage. Had control of my life suddenly been threatened that abruptly and radically, I'd have wanted the man dead, too.

Reverend Lawrence Roberts, doctor of divinity by some ROM-staffed diploma mill, had decided to make that band of kids his own little project. He wanted to redeem their lives. Not only did he intend

to baptize them into his particular sect of Christianity, but he wanted to get them System Identification Numbers and bring them back into the mainstream of society. He wanted to create in them an example of a way Christians could fight back against Satan's rule on the earth.

Raven had Tom Electric run a sample of one of Roberts' services by me. It was part of a simsense tape package that Roberts' ministry offered. I got version 20M because I was a male in my 20s. Because simsense records and feeds back the emotions of the person observing the service, matching me with the appropriate tape was vital for me to get the full impact of the good doctor's presentation. As the static wall thinned and evaporated, the tape played for me and the Old One growled in disgust.

The preacher oozed charisma from the top of his thin, blond hair to the Italian leather loafers on his feet. Clutching a battered Bible, he looked out from his lectern like a prisoner about to confess before a jury. One amid thousands, I felt my heart begin to pound with anticipation.

"Yes, my friends, the things you have heard about me are true." He started in low embarrassed tones, but I sensed he was in control of the whole situation at all times. "Fifteen years ago I was nothing but a con man, and one of the most vile stripe. My partner and I used to read the newsfax to see who had died, then we'd print up a customized edition of a Bible. It would be inscribed from the deceased to whoever his survivor happened to be." He showed us his well-used book. "This was the last of the Bibles we ever created."

"We knew no shame. We'd go to the bereaved and asked for the deceased. When we were informed of the death, we'd get embarrassed and eventually confess that the deceased had special ordered the Bible. He had paid only ¥20 of the ¥100 it cost, and had gotten it specially for whoever the person was to whom we were speaking. We said we were sorry for bothering them in their grief and turned to leave."

Roberts' eyes flashed down at the ground as a blush rose to his cheeks. He stared at one of the many carnation bouquets surrounding him. "Of course, the bereaved would stop us and give us the ¥80 remaining on the book. We would then hand it over, having earned an easy ¥75 profit. It was an easy life, for anyone would pay gladly for that last piece of their departed loved one, and we talked ourselves into believing that we were really offering them another chance to say goodbye—manufacturing memories the people so dearly hungered after."

Roberts brought his head up, and steel entered his spine. I knew, aided by the digitized emotional feed coursing in through the 'trodes, that Roberts had somehow been motivated away from this evil path. He smiled and confirmed my belief.

"Then, one night, my partner and I were heading out for what would be our last attempt. God and the Devil came to us, and each showed us a vision of what we would reap in the afterlife. My partner held his hand out to the Devil and was taken to hell right then and there. I looked upon the face of God and chose the path of light. Praise Jesus, I was saved!"

Thunderous applause washed over me, and I found myself mouthing the word "Alleluia!" I pulled the 'trodenet off in disgust and let the Old One's growl rumble from my throat. Raven looked over at me and smiled. "What do you think, Wolf?"

I patted my Beretta Viper. "I've got a love offering for the good reverend, right here."

Raven decided that might be a bit extreme as our first effort at contact. He gave me the address for Roberts' ministry headquarters. I changed into a corduroy suit jacket, button-down shirt and tie before I headed out, deferring to Raven's sense of decorum, not mine. The tie and jacket hid my silver wolf's-head pendant and my Beretta, but I didn't so much mind that. When entering the lion's den, it's best to dress like a lion.

III

Roberts' personal secretary was pretty enough that I would have considered converting were she willing to do some missionary work with me. She flashed me a smile as I came up the stairs to the third floor foyer, but she kept getting distracted by the big goomer seated on the edge of her desk. He was clearly intent on ministering to her, but she looked like she wanted him exorcised faster than you could say "amen."

I cleared my throat and quickscanned her nameplate. "Evening, Miss Crandall. I'm Wolfgang Kies. I called ahead for an appointment with Dr. Roberts."

The big man moved off the desk as she positively glowed at me. "Yes, Mr. Kies, 6:45 and you're on time exactly." Her smile carried right on up into her blue eyes and clearly irked the man.

"Do I get points for punctuality?"

"With me you do, Mr. Kies." She looked up at the man. "Brother Boniface will take you to Dr. Roberts."

Boniface looked like an ape that had been dipped in Nair, or a troll that had been cold hammered into a smaller shape. Either way he did not look happy to be in a suit or being sent on a mission that would take him away from the charming Miss Crandall. As a result of his discomfort, somewhere inside his tiny skull one electron collided with another, and all of a sudden he had a thought. It was too much for him to contain, and he made his move to frisk me.

The Viper's barrel made a thunk sound as I drew it in one smooth motion and poked a Mark of Cain in the center of Brother Boniface's forehead. He retreated a step and raised both hands to cover the bruise. "Ask, and ye shall receive, Boniface. Presume, and I'll make a martyr out of you."

I let the gun slip forward and hang from my index finger by the trigger guard. Boniface made a grab for it, but I ducked it beneath his hand and slid it onto Miss Crandall's desk. "Keep it warm for me."

"My pleasure," she cooed. The gun slipped from sight beneath the level of her desk.

Boniface slunk forward and led me down a short hallway to Roberts' office. He only opened one of the two oak doors, but it was double-wide anyway and provided a stunning panorama as I entered. I didn't feel slighted only getting a single-door treatment because I got the distinct impression even if Jesus returned for an encore he wouldn't get a two-door salute.

The very first thing I noticed in the room was the expensive wooden paneling on the walls, and the stunning number of leatherbound books in the bookshelves. Reverend Roberts had laid out significant nuyen to splash old world respectability in his office. The west wall was made entirely of glass, and the view it gave of the Sound impressed even the Old One. Shown a picture of this place and asked to choose whether it belonged to some highly placed corpgeek or a preacher constantly crying poormouth, I'd have been wrong even with two free guesses.

It took me about two seconds to scan the place and get the Old One's howl to vet my opinion. By that time, the unearthly scent of hundreds of carnations assaulted my nose. Save for the top of Boniface's head, every flat surface in the room boasted a vase jammed with carnations of various colors. I recalled the riot of flora surrounding the reverend on the tape, but 3-D reality was another order of magnitude above the pictures.

The gaudiest of the carnations resided in the buttonhole of Roberts' lapel. Standing behind his desk, the preacher nodded to me and extended his hand. "Welcome, Mr. Kies."

I accepted his hand and found his grip disturbingly firm. I normally judge a man by how he shakes hands, but Roberts' grip felt too right and practiced. The difference might have been subtle, and I could have put it down to my general dislike of him, but I got the feeling he was playing at being a regular guy.

"I thank you for agreeing to see me on such short notice." I dropped myself into the chair in front of his desk. Boniface drifted over to stand right behind me, but I chose to ignore him. "I apologize for any inconvenience this might be for a man with your busy schedule."

Roberts nodded and gave me a reassuring smile. "How could I refuse to see you when the message said you were interested in the children in the Barrens?"

His smile grew, and his hands spread wide apart. "Of course, I have heard of your Dr. Raven. While I have never had cause to use the services of an individual in your trade, what I have heard about Dr. Raven has been very encouraging. The respect in which he is held by some of the lower classes will help ease concerns about possible sinister motives on my

part. I must admit, however, I had not expected Raven to join forces with me in this matter."

I leaned back in the padded, leather chair. "I hate to burst

your bubble, Reverend Roberts, but I am not here to offer Raven's help concerning the children. We want you to leave them alone."

His head came up and a bit of light reflected from his scalp despite the thinly sown rows of blond hair transplants. "Leave them alone? How can I do that, Mr. Kies?" His wounded tone began to parallel the tape's parable preamble, but I could do nothing to deflect him. "Those children need help. They need good food and schooling and direction. They cannot be allowed to waste away in the dungheap of society. We must take them into our fold to encourage others to do the same."

"Dr. Raven agrees with you, Reverend." I held a hand up, sending a quiver through Boniface. "He's already running full background checks on all the children in that house, using resources you don't command. He will find out who they really are and will get them help. We can get them protection in the Barrens, and we can ensure they will have the aid necessary for them to rise above their beginnings."

"Can you, Mr. Kies? Can you expect me to back off when what you suggest is making them fit fish for that small pond, whereas I will take them away from the Barrens and make them productive members of society?"

I didn't like the reproving tone of his question. "The people of the Barrens are capable of taking care of themselves. Betty Beggings and others work to form metafamily groups and give people a solid base from which to operate."

Roberts smiled like a shark. "But they do not have the resources at my command." He stood and indicated the opulence in his office. "They can command tribute from others in the Barrens, dividing and subdividing a very small pie into yet tinier morsels. I, on the other hand, solicit money from the rich and well-to-do in this society. I get in single contributions more nuyen than Betty Beggings and all her ilk see in a lifetime. I can do for these children what no one else can do."

"But you do it at the cost of their freedom. They do not want your help."

Roberts batted my objection aside contemptuously. "They are without proper documentation. They do not know what they want. The law says they must have custodianship, and I have chosen to be their benefactor. In following my example, other members of my flock will adopt children from the Barrens, and we will rebuild this society."

My eyes slowly shifted from green to silver as my anger rose. "You will remake these children in your image?"

The good reverend ignored my question as he walked toward the wall of windows in his office. Standing with his back to me, the dying sun cut him into a silhouette outlined by a red corona. The shadow narrowed then expanded again as he turned to face me. "Do you believe in God, Mr. Kies?"

"I fail to see what that has to do with the matter at hand."

"I'm sure you do, and I will accept that as a 'no' for the sake of what I am about to say. You see, I *do* believe in God. I believe in a merciful and forgiving God, but a God who demands his people work for their salvation. Once upon a time I was like those children—wild, abandoned and angry at society. Then God gave me a choice: eternal damnation or life with him forever. For the first time I looked beyond my next meal and chose a course for my life."

The silhouette hung its head wearily. "My choice is not without its price. My God demands I do all I can to help lead others to him. The kingdom of Satan started its millennial domination of the Earth in 2011—the dragon was seen in Japan to herald this change. All this magic is merely Satan's will made manifest. It is my duty and my calling to do all I can to bring Satan's reign to an end, and I *will* do it."

The strength in his voice spoke to me of a fanatical devotion to what he saw as his divine calling, but somewhere, deep down, I felt



I was being conned. "I don't think we have anything more to discuss, Reverend Roberts." I started to rise from my chair, but two heavy hands jammed me back down into it.

"You don't go until Reverend Roberts says you can go."

Deep inside, in the lightless cavern in which the wolf spirit dwells within me, the Old One howled bloody murder. Insistently he demanded I let him have control. He promised to reshape me into an engine of primal fury. *I will show them justice and righteousness!*

I forced myself to be calm, but I let some of the Old One's anger enter my voice. "Larry, do you practice faith healing?"

Roberts stiffened at the tone of my words, then nodded. "I do."

"Good. Brother Boniface has three seconds to stop this laying-on of hands, or he'll need all the healing you can give him."

His hands tightened.

"Two."

Roberts waved Boniface back, and the pressure eased. The reverend returned to his desk and seated himself. "Brother Boniface can be overzealous, but that can be said of all my warriors for Christ." Though he smiled benignly, the implied threat was not lost on me.

I stood slowly and straightened my jacket as Boniface retreated and opened the door. "You may not believe this, Larry, but I actually do respect those who listen to the message from the Prince of Peace. I think, however, the words you're hearing are a bit garbled. Let me make this very clear: Leave those children alone."

Roberts smiled and laid his right hand on the Bible I'd seen him thump in the tape. "I understand your words, Mr. Kies, but I cannot be deflected from my course. On this very Bible I swore I would help them. I cannot go back on my word."

I snatched the Bible from beneath his hand and saw him blanch as I started to flick the pages open. I saw that the liner sheet backing the cover had popped free. Amid the glue stains I could see a curious collection of strange symbols, but they were as much gibberish as the Greek passages on the facing pages of the book. The flyleaf had been inscribed, "To my darling Tina, I will love you for eternity. Andrew Cole."

He made a grab for it, but I held it back, frustrating his effort. My stare met his, and he flinched. "Consider this a reading from the Second Book of Revelations: 'And the Wolf saith unto the preacherman, if you want apocalypse, stay your course.'"

I tossed the Bible onto the blotter and plucked a carnation from the vase on his desk. Stuffing it into the buttonhole on my jacket, I turned on my heel and left him scrambling to clutch the Bible to his chest. I headed straight to the door, but Boniface grabbed me and spun me around to face him before I could leave the office.

"This is not over between us." Though his back was to the window, the solar effect did nothing but make him a big-eared shadow. The threat in his voice made him into a big-eared shadow clown.

I nodded slowly and carefully, letting the Old One fill me with the strength and speed I'd need. "You have a point there, Boniface. What do say we take it outside?"

His smile widened his cheeks enough to nearly eclipse his ears. "Yeah, outside."

My hands shot up into his armpits and boosted him back toward the window before he could so much as yelp with surprise. The glass shattered in a halo fashion starting with the area around his head, then fragmented into a million pieces. The glittering glass shower rained down as Boniface disappeared from view. A second later a vase of carnations I'd pulled from a table near the door followed him to the street.

I wiped my hands off on the drapes. "Sorry about ruining the view. Good day."

Outside, after I'd shut the door behind me, I noticed Miss Crandall was having a hard time keeping a smile from her lips. She slid my gun across the desk to me.

"Much obliged."

Her blue eyes sparkled. "My pleasure, Mr. Kies. God be with you."

"Thank you, Miss Crandall, I'm sure one of them is."

IV

I got back into my Fenris and punched in the ignition code. The scream of an ambulance siren started the Old One howling triumphantly in my head. I pulled away from the curb and got off the road before the DocWagon™ careened around the corner, lights blazing. It headed for the alley into which Boniface had plunged while I started down 5th Ave.

The meeting with Roberts left me angry and not a little puzzled. I had hoped explaining to him that the kids didn't want his help, and reassuring him that they would be taken care of, would be enough to deflect him. Raven had dealt with other "do-gooders" in that manner, and they were content to let shadowfolk take care of their own.

I'd believed I could accomplish my mission until Roberts asked the stopper question: "Do you believe in God?" I'd known other preachers and found them all quite capable of rational thought and the logical analysis of a problem. Like Roberts, however, when a discussion took them into a realm where they had no expertise or facts to bolster their argument, they resorted to the divine shield. For them, and for him, the ultimate refuge boils down to this: "We might not understand it, but it is part of God's plan, and we must do what we can to empower it or Satan will win."

I was willing to grant Roberts his supposition that Satan had taken over the Earth in 2011, when magic made its return to the world. At the risk of being seen as a heretic, I also acknowledged that the reemergence of magic in the world had done virtually nothing to change the lot in life for most folks. Yes, the few lucky ones who could wield magic were able to turn that talent into a career, but it did nothing for the magic-blind in the world. Giant corps still controlled the economy, and most of them controlled cadres of magickers as well.

I recognized my mental discussion was doing several undesirable things. First, I had half a mind to turn around and defoliate Roberts' boutonniere with 9mm weedkiller. I realized that particular half of my mind had been taken over by the Old One, so I tucked the Homicide Hound back into his little box. I also saw that I was heading south toward the Barrens, and I knew I'd not feel good unless I could ensure that the kids were safe. While Roberts seemed very earnest and directed in his Christianity, the theatrical bits layered on top of it still made me uneasy.

More than any of that, though, it dawned on me that I was hungry. I scanned the street and slid the Fenris into a parking place just up the block from a Dominion pizza joint. Even with an armed escort they'd never consider delivering to the Barrens, so I went in and ordered five pizzas, including two vegetarian specials just in case Kyrie was not a carnivore.

While waiting for my order, I decided to call the office. I got change for a nuyen from the clerk and pumped it into a pay phone. Valerie Valkyrie, our computer specialist, answered and got Raven for me immediately.

"How did it go, Wolf?"

"I discovered Roberts' bodyguard can't fly." I grimaced and chewed on my lower lip for a second. "Roberts appreciates our concern, but he says he's made the kids into a centerpiece for a drive to encourage his flock in helping the disadvantaged. He sounds sincere, but something deep down inside me doesn't like him, and I agree."

Raven asked some pointed questions, and I reported the meeting back to him as completely as I could. He sounded most interested in the Bible, its inscription and the sigils, but my momentary glance at them meant the information I gave him was fairly useless. I promised I'd try to duplicate the symbols for him when I returned to headquarters and told him I was taking some food to the kids.

"Good idea, Wolf. Valerie has turned up some interesting information on Roberts, but we've yet to find anything truly sinister. I'll have her working on this Tina and Andrew Cole. Maybe we'll have something when you get back here."

"Good. I'll be back early, I think."

I hung up and discovered, to my surprise, that my order was ready. I took the pizzas out to the Fenris and belted the stack of boxes into the passenger seat. As I got the car on the road, my

stomach growled more fiercely than the Old One had ever managed. Kid Stealth would have questioned the wisdom of bringing my Fenris within a nautical mile of the Barrens, but then he feels like he's travelling in a kiddie car if the vehicle isn't armored and doesn't have a .50-caliber machinegun mounted in a turret on top. I parked right in front of the crib that had been my temporary home and set the antitheft system on "maim." With a stack of pizzas precariously balanced on my left hand, I knocked on the door of the ramshackle townhouse.

Kyrie answered the door and didn't recognize me by what little of my face looked at her over the top box. "You've got the wrong place. We didn't order any pizza."

I lowered the boxes and smiled at her. "Not to worry, this is Dominion's new service. We drop pizza off, and you pay for what you eat. You're a test market."

She laughed lightly, and I saw true happiness in her face for the first time. "Smile like that more often, Kyrie, and I think you could convince Dominion this service is more than worth it."

Her dark eyes glowed with a more mischievous light. "I'm sure Dominion would just love to give me an endorsement contract. We eat pizza fairly often, and it's usually theirs." She stepped back away from the door. "C'mon in before the neighborhood catches a whiff of that stuff."

Albion met us halfway to the kitchen, and I dealt him a box off the top. Sine splashed a bucket of water over a soapy collection of plates and glasses in the sink, then wiped her hands off and took a box from me. With one broad swipe with the box she cleared some old paper plates and styrofoam burger cartons from the table onto the floor. When that earned her a reproving glare from Kyrie, her next pass was less swift and more silent.

Cooper came clumping up the steps from the basement and shut the door behind himself. He looked at me and smiled. I presented him a box with all the ceremony of Seattle's governor bestowing a citizenship medal on someone, and his smile broadened to show me all of his teeth. He scrambled up on a stool beside Sine and pried his box open.

I handed Kyrie the next to last box, leaving one for me. "Help yourself. Raven doesn't often cater his jobs, but when he does, the food is good."

She smiled and looked down timidly. She started to say something, but Cooper's surprised shout cut her off. "This isn't pizza!"

"Sure it is, Cooper. I just got it myself from Dominion. Eat it and you'll grow up to be big and strong like Jimmy Mackelroy."

The little guy shook his head adamantly and jammed tiny fists against his hips. "Nope, it's not pizza. It doesn't have pizza stuff on it." He glared at me, his lower lip thrust out defiantly.

I frowned and looked to Kyrie. "Pizza stuff?"

She blushed. "You don't want to know. We do most of our food shopping in dumpsters." She set her pizza down on the kitchen shelf and squatted beside Cooper. "Listen, Coop, this is special pizza, that's why it doesn't have pizza stuff on it. You don't have to scrape it off, see?"

Cooper's eyes flashed warily. "Special?"

Kyrie nodded emphatically. "It's birthday pizza. Today is Wolf's birthday, and he's sharing his birthday pizza with us."

Electric excitement lit Cooper's face with neon intensity. "Weally? It's yuwa biwdfay?"

I tossed him a wink. "You bet—that's why I have this flower on. Now eat your pizza so I'll have a good birthday, okay?"

"Kay."

Kyrie walked back over to me and hugged her arms around herself. "A carnation. You went to see Roberts, didn't you?"

"Sure did." I started to reach for some pizza, but the worry in her voice cut my hunger. "I tried to explain to him that you wanted to be left alone, but I don't think he got the message. Still, his bodyguard will be recovering from a test of faith, so we might have bought some time. Don't worry, you'll be fine."

I wanted to reach out and take her in my arms just to reassure her, but she held herself back and I instantly knew why. Her welcoming a hug would have showed weakness, and that she could not allow.

Albion styled himself the leader of the little band, and probably did motivate them to get lots of things done, but Kyrie certainly held the group together on a daily basis. If she gave him any opening, he would lead the group to ruin because of his bitterness and anger.

Cooper hopped down off his stool and came over to take her hand. "Don't wowwy, Kywie. Mista Wolf and Hawse will protect us. I pwomise." As if that affirmation had set all right with the world, he smiled and returned to smearing more pizza sauce over his face.

In a quiet voice I asked, "Hawse?"

Kyrie licked her lips. "When we scavenge, we sometimes have to leave Cooper here all by himself. Harse is his imaginary friend. He says Harse is guarding the house, and it helps keep Cooper calm, so we don't discourage him. Everybody has imaginary friends when they're young. He'll outgrow it."

"Or write simsense scripts about it and get rich. Listen, Raven wants me back at headquarters so we can figure out what we're doing next. I'll take a look around the area just to make sure nothing strange is going down, then I'll take off." I folded one piece of pizza over on another and saluted the assembly with it. "Thanks for sharing my birthday pizza, gang. See you later."

The second I stepped from the slice of multiplex that housed the kids, I felt something was wrong. The Old One kept a growl simmering in the back of my mind, and the hackles rose on my neck. The Barrens is, even at the best of times, a lawless warground that makes all but the irredeemably insane feel insecure. This time, however, it felt malevolent.

I bit off some pizza and chewed as I started a circuit around the block. I reached inside and demanded the Old One lend me his heightened senses. He did so, but the garlic in the pizza quickly erased any advantage the Old One's olfactory abilities might have given me. Still his increased nightvision did help me pierce shadows, and his hearing made audible everything from rats scrambling inside walls to lies whispered passionately in one of the upper floor apartments across the street.

I definitely heard something out of the ordinary. It started with the slushy, muffled sucking sound that a boot would make when slowly drawn out of mud. Along with that came the crunch of beer-bottle glass being ground against stones and a metallic clinking like links of a chain striking a post. And yet, as clearly as I heard what I have described, I heard much more as those sounds played in concert with others.

Above and beyond that I knew two other things. Had I tried to point those sounds out to anyone without hypersenses, they would have thought me crazy. The sound had no rhythm or repetition and thereby it avoided classification. It could have been a figment of my imagination, but given my other realization, I was uncomfortable in dismissing it as such.

It was stalking me.

That's not a conclusion I drew without benefit of experience. I've been stalked by some of the best. Two of the Elven High Lord's Paladins came after me during the Full Moon Slashings. Back before he became one of us, Kid Stealth had done his best to put my head on his trophy wall. Each and every time the uneasy feeling I get coiling in my guts tells me I'm one rung down on someone's idea of the food chain, and I don't like it.

I swallowed, and the pizza spiraled into the knot that had once been my stomach.

I turned toward the place where the sound was coming from, but I saw nothing huddled in the piles of debris between two buildings. I tossed the pizza away and drew my Viper. I hunkered down behind the burned-out hulk of a Miata II GS and suddenly found an acrid, bitter odor dissolving the garlic and carnation scents from my nose. Whoever or whatever was coming after me had bizarre ideas about personal hygiene.



Waiting behind cover irritated the Old One no end. *Do not slink here like a coward, Longtooth. Let me help you. I will destroy this thing that hunts us. Leave it to me.*

I shook my head. Though the scent had grown strong enough to be completely distracting, I concentrated beyond it. I heard a different sound: running feet. They were approaching from my back. I whirled and jammed my Viper toward the car's rear bumper.

Cooper stopped short and looked at me with eyes full of innocent hurt. "Mista Wolf?"

I swallowed hard. "Cooper! What are you doing out here?"

His smile cracked caked tomato sauce at the corners of his mouth. He extended a newspaper-wrapped bundle bound with string. "Bwifday pwsent."

Somehow, as if his words were a magic spell, the sensation of being hunted vanished. I slid the Viper back into the shoulder holster and accepted the little, pencil-thin package. I carefully tugged the string off it. "Did you wrap this yourself?"

He nodded proudly.

"You did a good job, Cooper. Why, what is this?"

As I peeled the paper away, I knew exactly what his gift was. The slender, boxy stick was a credstick. They came in one of two flavors. A personal or account credstick has a microchip in it that can be encoded to take care of credits and debits—as convenient as cash and no problem with arguing if a corp's scrip is good this month or not.

The second type, of which this was one, is a bearer stick. It has a set amount of credit burned into the chip. When that is transferred into a computer banking account or into a person's credstick, the chip melts. Some corps mass produce them for petty funds expenses, but those sticks are generally of low credit value. The chief benefit of the bearer stick is that it can be used to transfer large amounts of funds without their being immediately traceable. Bearer sticks are small, unmarked bills in a much handier package.

The bearer stick Cooper had given me had been broken in half. The break, which rendered it useless, was jagged, so I assumed it was an accident. I fingered both halves, but couldn't make heads or tails of the coloring scheme on them. I looked up to see an expectant expression on Cooper's face. "Thank you very much, Cooper."

His voice sank into a whisper. "The othews look to the longa ones, so I decided to give you two of the small ones." He clapped his hands. "You and Hawse will keep us safe."

I tousled his blond hair. "You got that right. Harse will have to watch you right now, because I've got to go talk to Raven. Thanks again for the present."

The little boy beamed, then turned and ran off into the shadows. I noticed he headed straight for the area from which I had earlier heard the sounds, but he disappeared before I could warn him away. Using the Old One's ears, I heard him giggle happily, and I envisioned more pizza leftovers peeling off his face.

Hopping into my Fenris, I made a quick circuit of the area, then left the Barrens to ward their own.

V

The scowl on Valerie's face meant only one of two things. Either the Seadogs were losing, or she'd not been very successful in getting data out concerning the Right Reverend Roberts. "What's the score?"

She shrugged. "Roberts 1, me zippo." Her frown darkened her cafe-au-lait skin, but only intensified the azure fire in her eyes.

Raven came down the stairs and gave Valerie an encouraging smile. "I'd not say that, Val. You've pulled plenty of data on all the Andrew Coles who've ever lived in Seattle." He tapped the hardcopy report in his hands. "This stuff on the kids is very complete. You've also given us a rundown on Roberts' empire. As soon as your other ferret programs report back, you'll have everything you set out to get."

Val's blue eyes narrowed. "I know, but something is wrong with that report on Roberts. I know it's been tampered with."

"Mycroft?" I asked, naming the only other computer expert I knew of.

Valerie wrinkled her pretty nose. "No, if it were Mycroft I'd have to be in and dissecting it with a scalpel. This file's forcing me to use a chainsaw. If I had to guess, I'd say it's got a government mask running over a transcription program."

Raven's head came up. "Assuming you're right, how tough would it be for Roberts to find out the government is tapping his accounts to keep track of him?"

"Not that hard." Val half-closed her eyes as she concentrated. "Jack could spot it, and maybe the Glass Tarantula. Maybe a half-dozen other deckers in Sea-Tac, but his network goes all over. He could have deckers from New York or Dallas checking his stuff."

Doc nodded thoughtfully. "Wolf, did you learn anything from the children when you went out there?"

I seated myself on the edge of a chair. "No, not really. Most of the food they eat is scavenged, but I think I knew that all along anyway." I plucked the carnation from my lapel and tossed it into the trash. "Wait, I did get something."

I reached into my pocket and pulled out both halves of the broken credstick. "Cooper gave this to me as a birthday present."

Raven took the two halves and fitted them together. Wetting the tip of his finger with his tongue, he washed away some of the mud and got a clear look at the colored markings on it. He stared at it for a second, then turned to Val. "Cross-correlate Cole, Andrew with Kensington Industries." He studied the stick for another second. "Backdate the search from 15 years ago to 2005. When you get a match, give me resident data for the house the kids are squatting in for the month on either side of Cole's death date. I'll also need a full file on the house's resident at that time, starting with Lone Star data."

I managed to pick my jaw up off the ground by the time Raven looked back at me. "What are you looking for?"

"I scanned the Cole data earlier, and I seem to recall an Andrew Cole working for Kensington Industries. The color coding on this credstick is the type they used for a period between 2005 and 2035, before their merger with Muriata."

I nodded. "Didn't Kensington get into money trouble, so Muriata came in like a white knight before Beatrice-Reylon could snap them up?"

Raven smiled. "Wolf, I'm surprised at your knowledge of Seattle's financial history."

I said nothing. I wasn't going to tell him it had been the subject of a miniseries docudrama infocast I'd once seen.

"Home run, Doc!" Valerie's enthusiastic shout saved me from any chance of Raven testing my command of mergers and acquisitions among megacorps. "Cole, Andrew, married to Tina, died 14 March 2034. He worked in their accounting and disbursement division and was under suspicion of having embezzled 500,000 nuyen in bearer credsticks. Tina died just last year, but Kensington gave her a clean bill because she never spent a dime that couldn't be accounted for by her income. Insurance paid Kensington/Muriata off after her death."

"And the resident of the house where the kids are?"

"Thomas Harrison lived there from June of 2033 to March of 2034. The house was reported abandoned after some food riots in the area. Officials list it as ASC-1, but no one has filed a claim on it, so it technically remains in the hands of the city. Harrison himself was a small-time hood and con man." She spun in her chair. "He has a list of bunko arrests longer than Mackelroy's hit streak!"

I blinked twice. "Wanna bet Harrison was the unnamed partner the good reverend claims the devil took away?"

Raven nodded. "They went to work the Bible scam on Tina Cole after her husband died. She doesn't buy into it, but confesses to these two obviously godly men that her husband has been stealing from his corporation."

"Yeah, Doc, yeah. She's afraid for his soul, so they offer to return the credsticks to Kensington anonymously. That way her husband gets eternal salvation, and his terrestrial reputation doesn't take any hits either. Harrison and Roberts have 500,000 nuyen in credits to split, and Harrison skips with them?"

Raven shook his head. "I doubt it. Harrison would have gone through 500,000 in 16 years. Given Roberts' success in that time, I would have to assume Harrison would return to blackmail his former partner. I am certain Harrison is dead and that Roberts killed him in a rage after Harrison said he'd hidden the loot."

"I don't follow."

Raven folded his arms. "The Bible Roberts has and uses is left over from the scam they tried to work on Tina Cole. I suspect Harrison hid clues to the location of the credstiks in the Bible. The symbols you saw on the cover liner are undoubtedly a code that leads to the credstiks. The glue finally gave way, exposing the secret, and Roberts has deciphered it."

I frowned heavily. "I've been to his office. What's 500,000 nuyen going to be to this guy?"

"Curveball, wait, two curves," Val announced as her computer beeped at her. "To answer your first question, Wolf, ¥500,000 is the cost of getting out of Seattle and living comfortably. The government has a lock on all of Roberts' accounts pending an investigation of fraud on his proposed Jesusville Amusement Park and Devotion Center."

"What else?"

"Second curve. Roberts has filed to take possession of the house under an ASC-1 action. He has had some judge give him custodianship of the kids in a phantom hearing, so he's got the Abandoned/Squatter Claim filed in their names. Lone Star is supposed to be heading out there to help him serve the papers right now."

Raven tucked the credstik pieces into his pocket. "Val, file an ASC-1 counterclaim on the property." He tore a sheet from the hardcopy file he'd been reading. "Use this name if the computer will take it; otherwise file it in my name, and we'll fight it out later. Wolf, let's move."

The Fenris left two blackened patches on the floor of the garage and part of one on every curve we took as we headed toward the house. I didn't just break speed laws, I smashed them to up-quarks. We surprised the hell out of some Ancients as I took a shortcut through part of their turf, but the Elven bikers abandoned the chase when they realized by my driving that I wasn't in the mood for games.

Standing on the brakes, I swung the Fenris wide around the last corner and brought it smack up against the curb just at the edge of the streetlight's circle of illumination in front of the house. Further up along the street I saw a Lone Star car with the driver's door open and light strobing. Beyond that Reverend Roberts stood in the shelter of his limo.

The Lone Star cop looked over at us as we exited my car with our hands up. "Just get back into your car, Wolf, and leave. We have enough trouble without you here."

"Not much for gratitude, are you, Harry Braxen?" I let my hands drop slowly and closed my door with a hip-check. "Doctor Raven is helping these kids, so just chill."

The Ork Lone Star cop scowled. "Raven, I can run you in as easily as I can the kids. Roberts owns this place free and clear, and he's their guardian." He raised his voice for the benefit of the kids inside as well. "If they don't come out, I'm going to splash the loudmouth with the gun, then bring them out in handcuffs."

Raven raised a hand to hold the children back and another to calm Braxen. "Officer Braxen, no violence is necessary here. I believe, if you'll check your onboard computer, you will find the reverend's claim to this property is in dispute."

That bit of information brought a sharp yelp from Reverend Roberts. "Get thee behind me, Satan!" He marched forcefully forward, brandishing his Bible like a sword. He came to confront Raven, but still kept the Lone Star cruiser between himself and Doc. "You are meddling in good work being performed in the name of God."

Raven's head came up and a sardonic smile twisted his lips. "I was unaware 'God' was a synonym for 'greed,' Lawrence Roberts. I'm certain Tina Cole would be shocked at how you betrayed her trust."

In the half-second Roberts' terrified gaze swept from Raven's eyes to mine, I knew everything Raven had pieced together about him was true.

He started to stammer a denial, but an unearthly roar cut him off. Cooper came running through the front door, and Braxen hunkered down behind his door with his gun drawn.



Surging up and forward through the front yard I saw the thing I had heard and smelled before. More formless than humanoid, it writhed forward like an amoeboid centaur. A vast skirt of mud and gravel and debris swirled around to form a conical base that supported a lumpish torso with multiple arms. At the top of the torso I saw a shape that could have been described as a head, and when some of the slime dripped down I knew I saw bone.

The Old One howled out a challenge that had my skull bursting. I drew my Viper and snapped a round into the chamber, but couldn't see any spot to shoot on the thing that might hurt it. Cooper looked over at me with horror on his face and shouted, "Wolf, no!" He glanced at the creature and repeated the cry. "Hawse, no!"

The creature went straight for Roberts. Multiple bubbles burst from the area of its chest as if the creature tried to speak, but any sound it made was drowned out as Roberts held the Bible up and shouted something. The creature kept coming and, to my eye, picked up some speed. The good reverend tossed the book at the monster, missed high, then turned to run toward his limo. Harse shifted left, tracking accurately even though I couldn't see anything on it even approximating eyes.

Over the acrid burning stench of the creature, I caught a whiff of Roberts' flower and knew how Harse tracked him. It had to be orienting on the carnation. I'd been wearing one before, and it came after me until Cooper proclaimed me a friend. Now it went after Roberts.

I considered shouting a warning for a second or two, then dismissed the idea. Whatever would happen to him, Roberts had brought it on himself. It was time for the moneychanger to be cleared from the temple.

Roberts screamed incoherent prayers as the monster chased after him. He cut back and forth, trying to shake it, but had no success. Harse tracked Roberts like the best cyberbaker going after the bitcarrier in cyberball, closing with each turn Roberts took. The creature slid forward on a pool of mud and oily scum, cutting Roberts off from the limo.

His gun shaking like a china plate in an earthquake, Braxen looked over at me. I looked to Raven for guidance, but he just shook his head. He glanced at the children huddled around Cooper, then back at Roberts. Something in his eyes told me he wouldn't have stopped the creature if he could have.

Denied his escape, the reverend dropped to his knees. Screwing his eyesight shut, he clasped his hands together and prayed furiously. I don't remember the words he shouted exactly, mainly because they all sort of ran together, but they amounted to a confession of his sins and a promise to sin no more. Mind you, this is just a layman's opinion, but his catalog of sins was quite enough for several lifetimes.

He begged for God's absolution, and Harse made sure he was shriven.

The creature slammed into him like a dirt avalanche into a house. One second I could see Roberts, and the next he was covered in oozing muck. The reverend half-stumbled to his feet, literally knocked back by the monster, then fell again as his legs melted away. The creature's acidic touch peeled Roberts' flesh off and smoked his clothing away. He tried to scream, but could only vomit mud.

His body slumped face-first onto the ground, and Harse covered him with a cairn made of garbage. The tentacular arms dissolved into nothingness, and the molten mound stopped moving. A small dust devil danced up and away from the pile as if carrying off Harse's spirit.

Braxen slowly stood from behind his cruiser, and the kids left the safety of the front stoop. Cooper tried to dart forward, but Sine held him back. I took one last look at the barrow, shuddered, and put my pistol back in its holster. The Old One barked out one final challenge,

then retreated to his den.

Harry tipped his hat back. "What the hell was that?"

"Justice?" Raven, on one knee, examined the Bible Roberts had thrown. "This, along with Roberts' 'deathbed' confession indicates that he murdered his partner, Thomas Harrison, for a fortune in bearer credsticks. Roberts buried Harrison in the basement here. Apparently the ghost remained quiescent until Roberts took an interest in this place. His hatred for his old partner was strong enough for him to fashion a new body out of debris found in his grave and elsewhere."

Cooper sniffed. "I used to bring Hawse things."

I walked over to him and knelt down. "Don't be sad, Cooper. Harse—Harrison—protected you just the way you wanted him to. He's gone, but he's happy now. You want him to be happy, don't you?"

"Yes."

"Good." I stood slowly. "Well, Braxen, I think you can ignore the claim Roberts filed for this place."

The Ork frowned. "I'm afraid I can't, Kies. That claim is part of Roberts' estate."

Raven scooped the Bible up and tucked it under one arm. "Actually, officer, I think you'll find the counterclaim filed against the property is valid. After all, Kyrie has been living here for the requisite time to make a claim."

Kyrie stiffened.

Braxen shook his head. "Nice try, Raven, but she's SINless, so she can't own this place no matter how long she's lived here."

Raven turned and stared at Kyrie. "I did some checking, Salacia. You might have tried to run away from your family, but you are legal. The house is yours under the Squatting Statutes. Pay the back taxes on it, and you own it free and clear."

"Go for it, Kyrie," I smiled. "Harry, how much to claim this place?"

The Ork shrugged. "Ten grand, I think."

Kyrie's jaw dropped. "Where am I going to get 10,000 nuyen?"

Raven tossed her the Bible. "500,000 nuyen in bearer credsticks belonging to the Koshiyama Insurance Combine is hidden in a place indicated by the code on the cover liner. Standard recovery fee is 15%, which should buy you the house and plenty of the things Roberts would have offered you."

Sine picked Cooper up and hugged him, then he turned in her arms and gave Kyrie a kiss. "It's ah house now."

"Yes it is, Cooper—it's ours."

"Fine, take the house and everything," Albion snapped bitterly. "I'm outta here."

"What?" The hurt in Kyrie's eyes slashed through me like a monofilament whip.

"You've got a SIN. We don't trust anyone who's legal." He slapped Sine's shoulder with the back of his hand. "C'mon, Sine. She owns the house now, so we're leaving."

Sine shook her head. "I'll stay."

"Great. Hope the lot of you rot." He whirled around and ran into me.

"You and I need to talk in my office." I grabbed him by the back of his neck and force-marched him to the street. "Has the glue you use on your hair gone straight into your think-box or what?"

He stared at me sullenly when I released him. "She's legal. I don't trust anyone who's got a SIN."

"Think for a minute, will you?" I pointed back to where Kyrie and the others were studying the Bible's clue page. "She's had a SIN for the whole time you've known her, but she's pretended not to. Why do you think that is?"

"We'd kick her out if she told the truth."

"Listen to yourself. You know as well as I do that she could head out for the Tir and get help from the Elves down there. She doesn't need you, but you need her. Cooper and Sine need her. Kyrie hung in here because she didn't want the group to be torn apart."

He spat on the ground. "Good for her."

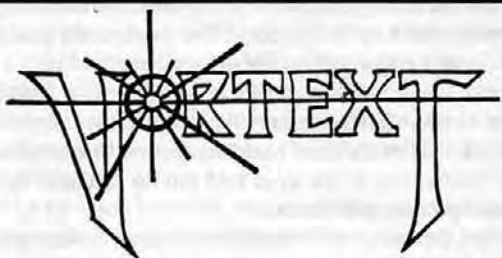
"They also need you. You provide the drive so things can get done."

Albion folded his arms across his skinny chest. "Great, fine, well, someone else can give them the kicks in the pants they need, not me. I'm outta here." He turned and walked away into the darkness.

I wandered back to the others. Kyrie looked up at me expectantly, but I just shook my head. "Sorry."

Cooper blinked his eyes as he turned to me. "Is Albion coming back?"

"I dunno, Cooper, I just don't know." I gave him a half-hearted smile. "Say your prayers and maybe he will." Ω



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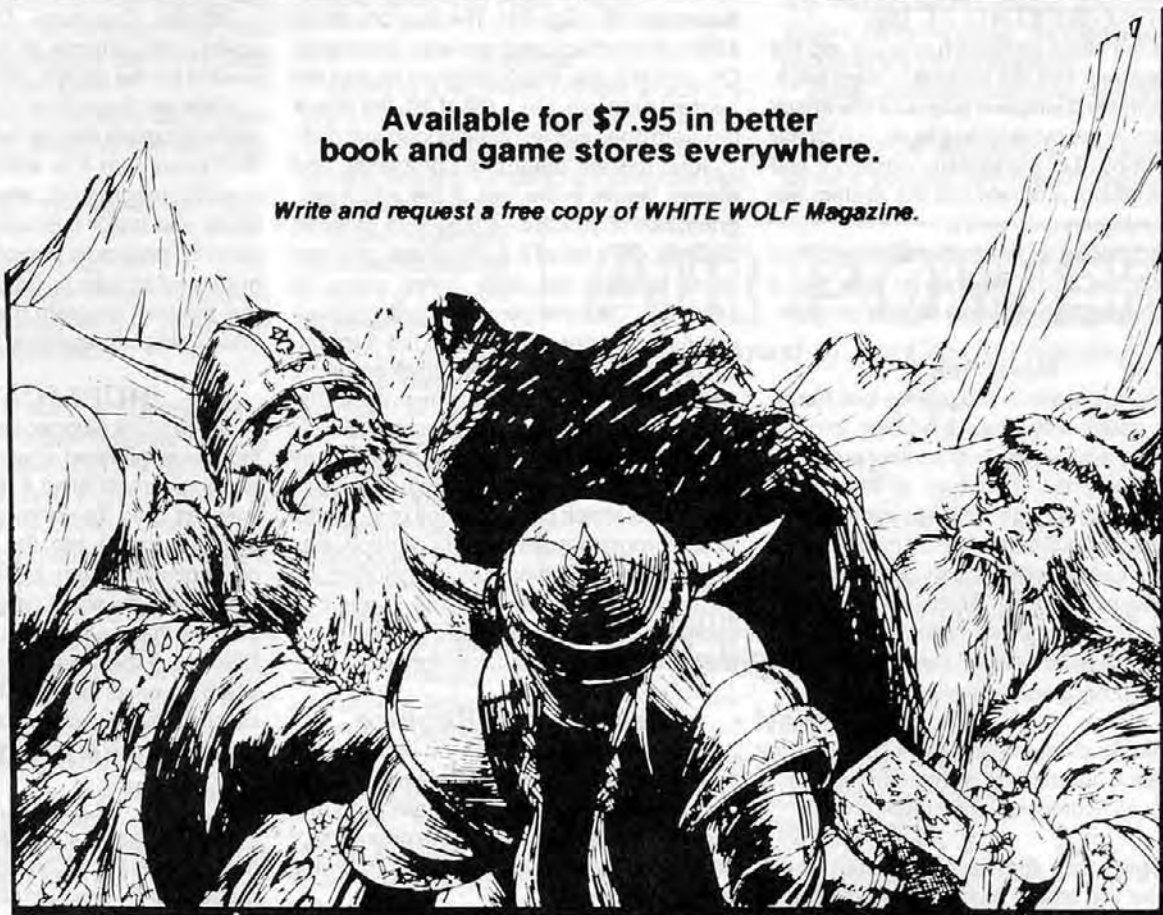
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CAMPAIGN BOOK



New Attack Programs for Cyberjockeys

Markku Honkonen

A cyberjockey's programs can be divided into two categories: attack and defense. The three main principles of attack programs are: to infiltrate the computer system, to duplicate, if possible, and to cause destruction and disorientation.

Attack programs have the same characteristics as decks (Speed, Accuracy, Offense, Defense and Volume). An attack program's volume is the space it needs in a deck rather than the space it has for storing programs. With the advanced state of high-tech computer security systems, attack programs have to be very complicated. This means that they are many megabytes long and quite expensive.

GETTING IT IN

First the attack program has to get into the target system. This can be done in many ways.

The first and simplest way is for the attack program or the cyberjockey to search for the weakest point of the system, destroy it and slip the attack program into the system before reinforcements arrive.

A second way to get into the target system is to mask the attack program to look like a harmless program or even a security program.

Disguise

Masking the attack program to look harmless is useful only when it is taken into the system by a cyberjockey or another program. It can delay the discovery of the attack program long enough for it to duplicate. After an attack program attacks, its masking disappears instantly. All security programs and cyberjockeys can roll a Difficult task to identify the program as an attack program. Cyberjockeys use their Computer skill, and security programs use their Offense.

Task: To disguise an attack program to look like a harmless program (Uncertain):
Difficult. Computer. 6 minutes.

Another tack that is often taken is to disguise the attack program to look like a security program, so that the security programs of the system it is entering will allow it to pass uninspected.

Task: To mask the attack program to look like a security program (Uncertain):

Formidable. Computer. 30 minutes.

Referee: Superficial damage and minor mishap both mean a small bug. Every round that the masked attack program is within 10 meters of a the security program, there is a chance it will be discovered as an attack program.

This chance is 1-3 on 1D10 if superficial damage was rolled and 1-5 on 1D10 if a minor mishap was indicated. Other cyberjockeys may roll for a Routine competitive task (see page 41 of the *Director's Guide*). The masker's Computer skill is compared against the possible discoverer's Computer skill.

A major mishap result means a major bug in the attack program. Every 10 minutes the referee should roll 1D10. On a roll of 1-7, nothing happens. On a roll of 8, the attack program goes into a loop; it can be recovered with Wrench (see *Earth/Cybertech Sourcebook*, page 83). The loop counts as if 25% of the attack program were destroyed. On a roll of 9, the attack program attacks the nearest program. On a roll of 10, the attack program goes into an endless loop and dies.

Total mishap means big problems, and always results in the loss of the attack program. Roll 1D10: On a -4, the attack program crashes. On a roll of 5-8, the attack program starts to duplicate wildly (once every 10 seconds), and the possible host program crashes. The only way to stop the duplicating is to destroy the "parent" attack program. After the parent program is destroyed, the attack program duplicates into useless pieces of code. By the way, when the cyberjockey attacks the parent attack program, D6+4 duplicates attack him! On a roll of 9-10, the attack program goes berserk. It duplicates and attacks everything in sight, including the cyberjockey and any of his friends in cyberspace. It can be stopped by destroying the parent program, as mentioned.

Destroy and Replace

The most popular trick of experienced cyberjockeys is to destroy a security program and replace it with an attack program. This is not easy because of the presence of other security programs. Use the following task.

Task: To replace a destroyed security program with an attack program (Hazardous):

Formidable. Computer. Offense. The time spent is the Volume of the attack program divided by the deck's Offense in rounds.

Referee: Any kind of mishap means the replacement attempt has failed. 1D6 other security programs have received an alert and will arrive in 1D10 turns.

Some expensive and rare attack programs can do the masking and replacing themselves. When an attack program tries such an action, it must roll the same task a cyberjockey would, but it uses its Offense instead of the cyberjockey's Computer skill.

Communications Program

The final way for an attack program to enter a system is for the cyberjockey to plant it in a communication program which goes into the system.

Task: To plant an attack program in a communication program:

Difficult. Computer. Offense. The time spent is the Volume of the attack program divided by the deck's Offense in rounds.

Referee: Superficial damage means the attack program can be detected on a 1-5 on D10 every turn it is within 10 meters of a security program or another cyberjockey. Minor and major mishaps mean one of the security programs notices the attack program and attacks it. Total mishap indicates that the host program has crashed and the attack program sustains 25% damage.

DUPLICATING

Some attack programs start duplicating after they have infiltrated a system. All duplicating attack programs need a host program where they can keep their original code. If an attack program comes into the system planted in some other program, it already has a host. In other cases, the attack program must find a free program that is not a security program (has no Offense). It then grafts itself to that program, which becomes its host. The process of duplication does not always cause a masked attack program to lose its masking.

COMBAT

Fighting against an attack program is resolved normally (see *Earth/Cybertech Sourcebook*), except that the program obviously cannot jack out. All attack programs always fight to the death. No mercy is asked for or given.

A cyberjockey may always try to capture an attack program that is used against him. In computer terms, the cyberjockey copies it safely to his deck, thus maintaining the origi-

nal code untouched for his use without setting it off in his deck simultaneously.

Task: To capture an attack program (Hazardous):

Impossible. Computer. 1 turn (absolute). (Nobody said it was easy!)

Referee: Superficial damage, minor and major mishaps mean the cyberjockey is stunned. He is stunned one turn if the result was superficial damage, D6-2 turns for minor mishap, and D6 turns for major mishap. During the time a cyberjockey is stunned, he cannot do anything.

EXAMPLE PROGRAMS

The following descriptions of attack programs are meant to be guidelines for referees. The first digit in the attack program's Speed characteristic is the movement rate of the attack program, and the second digit is the attack program's coolness under fire. All of the attack programs listed here are one-shot programs.

Fighter

Fighter is a very simple attack program. It cannot be masked, and it can get into the system only in some other program or with a cyberjockey's assistance. After Fighter has been planted, it has to be given time (2D6 turns) before it starts to duplicate. This makes Fighter a kind of time bomb.

Other cyberjockeys may try to stop Fighter from detonating by rolling the following task:

Task: To prevent the Fighter from detonating:

Difficult. Computer. 1 turn.

Referee: All mishaps mean the attack program has detonated, and the cyberjockey had better have a fast deck!

Fighter and its duplicates duplicate once in a minute. Only the parent fighter needs a host program to duplicate. The others can duplicate on their own. Fighter attacks all programs it meets but stays inside of the DOS tower it was planted in. When there are more than five fighters in the same part of a system, there is a 1 on 1D10 chance that one of them attacks the other Fighters.

Speed: 1/4 **Accuracy:** 4 **Offense:** 2 **Defense:** 2 **Volume:** 15 **Price:** Lv4000.

Cyberpoison

Cyberpoison is used to make a system weaker before a cyberjockey raids it. Cyberpoison attacks only security programs and does damage only to their Defense. It can attack other characteristics when in great distress, but it is not capable of inflicting great damage. Cyberpoison duplicates quite slowly (only once every 10 minutes). This is mainly because it is quite complicated (but the parent program can be masked, and it does not lose its masking due

to its duplication). It has a limited artificial intelligence, so it does not attack crowds of 10 security programs, friendly attack programs or its own duplicates.

Speed: 3/6 **Accuracy:** 6 **Offense:** 3 **Defense:** 4/1 (First digit denotes the amount of damage when attacking Defense; the other digit shows the damage caused to other characteristics.) **Volume:** 20 **Price:** Lv6000.

Carrier

Carrier is an attack program that "carries" other programs to the inside of the system. It has a Volume of 90 for the purpose of storing these programs. Carrier must always be masked, and it does not duplicate. After releasing all the programs it carries, it self-destructs and attacks all programs that are in the same part of the system with its Offense (except the attack programs it carried in). If a Carrier is destroyed, 75% of each program it carried will be destroyed; they will also be instantly released into the system.

Speed: 1/1 **Accuracy:** 1 **Offense:** 1/10 (The first number shows the attack program's Offense in combat while still "loaded"; the second number is used when Carrier has unloaded all its attack programs.) **Defense:** 1 **Volume:** 10-100 **Price:** Lv3000.

Cobra

Cobra is a high-tech combat attack program—it can sneak into a system on its own. It can try to evade in a manner similar to cyberjockeys, but instead of Computer skill, it uses its Defense.

Cobra duplicates once every minute for an hour. For a variable additional cost (at least Lv1000), it can include a homing routine programmed to let the attack program attack only specific types of programs (a competing warehouse, other cyberjockeys, security programs whose defense is under 5, etc.).

Speed: 2/7 **Accuracy:** 1 **Offense:** 5 **Defense:** 5 **Volume:** 18 **Price:** Lv8500.

AntiAP

AntiAP (for anti-attack program) is more like a security program than an attack program because it is designed to attack only other attack programs and cyberjockeys in a system. It does not make

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a distinction between hostile and friendly cyberjockeys; it attacks them all. For this reason, it is often keyed to be triggered by another security program. Usually at least one AntiAP lurks in every DOS tower.

Speed: 2/4 **Accuracy:** 3 **Offense:** 3 **Defense:** 3 **Volume:** 15 **Price:** Lv6000.

Black Soul

Black Soul is an extremely dangerous attack program. The referee should be careful using it because a fight against Black Soul could be short and frustrating.

At first glance, Black Soul does not seem to be particularly dangerous, because it isn't dangerous—against security programs. But when fighting against a cyberjockey, it is lethal. It can attack straight to a human's nervous system, incapacitating the weakest people with the first strike. When working with Black Soul, any mishap always means that Black Soul attacks the cyberjockey, his friends and other people in sight in cyberspace.

Black Soul duplicates once every 20 minutes.

Speed: 2/6 **Accuracy:** 4 **Offense:** 5 **Defense:** 4 **Volume:** 25 **Price:** Unavailable. ♪

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Psiberpunk

**What if that Solo
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the actions
of your group
really was psychic
or was working
with a psychic
who was
informing him
of your every
move ahead of
time?
Psionics in
Cyberpunk 2020—
the future just
got darker.
You better take off
your shades!**

Legion G. McRae

Our fascination with the powers of the mind has been around for millennia. Many colorful names have been given to those who have displayed some ability with these powers: Witch, fortune teller, oracle, and soothsayer are among the less unpleasant. Through these ages, attitudes toward psychics have ranged from awe to terror to hatred and prejudice.

Beginning in the late 20th century, a number of governments and corporations initiated programs to study the powers of the mind. Funded by strong governments or powerful corporations, and working in association with neurologists, biochemists, and geneticists, parapsychological researchers established psionic study and research institutes and laboratories across the globe. By the late 1990s, the old superpowers were known, despite their claims to the contrary, to have fielded espionage agents with psychic talents which had been scientifically enhanced or produced. This is the origin of the 21st century term "ESPionage."

GAINING PSYCHIC ABILITY

Many of the paranormality researchers labor under the belief that all people have psychic capability—that it is simply a matter of enabling them to realize their potential. On the other hand, many other paranormal authorities believe that very few people are psychic and that even fewer are able to achieve their full capabilities. Successful results have been achieved by both camps, and the work continues.

There are only two ways to get psychic ability in *Cyberpunk*: have it from the start of the game (from the character creation process) or undergo psychoactivity diagnosis and training.

Starting Out Psychic

In order for his character to be psychic at the start of the game, a player must roll less than or equal to twice his Luck on percentile dice *twice consecutively*. This may only be done during character creation, and may only be attempted once for any given character. A character's Luck may be applied to these rolls as allowed in the rules (a character may subtract up to his total Luck in points split between the two rolls to try to achieve low enough rolls).

Example: My character has a Luck of 7, so I have to roll 14 or less two times with percentile dice for him to start out psychic. I

have a pool of up to seven points total to subtract from one or both rolls.

If both rolls are successful, the character starts the game psychic. If either of these rolls is failed, the character is not psychic at the start of the game, nor does he suffer any ill effects.

If a negative result is rolled during character creation, a player may have his character resort to psychoactivity diagnosis.

Psychoactivity Diagnosis

Should a character wish to obtain psychic talent later in the game, he may volunteer to be a "guinea pig" in psychoactivity experimentation. A number of corporations and governments carry out ongoing studies of paranormal and so-called "superhuman" aptitudes and potentials.

Of course, the character might live to regret it, if he's unlucky.

If his character takes this route, a player must roll less than or equal to four times his Luck on four consecutive percentile dice rolls. A character's Luck stat may be applied to these rolls as allowed in the rules (a character may subtract up to his total Luck in points split between the four rolls to try to achieve low enough rolls).

Example: My original character, having failed his rolls to be psychic during character creation, signs on with Militech's ESPweapons Division to undergo psychoactivity testing. He still has a Luck stat of 7, so now I have to roll 28 or less four times with percentile dice to achieve a useable level of psychoactivity. I have a pool of up to seven points total to use as modifiers to these rolls.

● If all four rolls are successful, the character has developed a psychic talent.

● If one of the rolls is failed, the "guinea pig" does not become psychic, but he's also lucky enough to not get messed up.

● If two rolls are failed, on a 1D10 roll of 5 or less, the test subject loses one point from each of the following stats permanently (roll for each in turn): Intelligence, Reflexes, Cool, and Empathy. No psychic ability is gained.

● If three rolls are failed, the character's statistics suffer the same way as for failing two rolls (see above). The subject is also driven insane by the experiments and chemicals used on him. Roll 1D10. On a result of 5 or less, the character is unplayably insane (a gibbering ball of jelly, a homicidal maniac that would be an immediate target for police SWAT teams, etc.). Unplayably

insane characters should be treated the same as those suffering from cyberpsychosis—get out a new character sheet!

On a result of 6 to 10, the character becomes "playably" insane (he acquires paranoia, a very strong phobia, an inferiority or superiority complex, a split personality, etc.—great for roleplaying potential).

If the character is playably insane, the player and referee should collaborate to decide on the conditions of the character's insanity and how they will affect play in general and roleplaying in particular. Most libraries will have books on mental illnesses. You can use these as guides and references, or formulate an insanity based on literary or cinematic references. See the Cyberpsychosis tables on page 10 of *Solo Of Fortune* and page 20 of *Hardwired* for some quick ideas.

Although the character is driven mad, the same things which pushed him over the edge may also have stimulated his psyche. Roll 2D10. On the result of a natural 20 only, the character is crazy and psychic.

● If all four rolls are failed, the "guinea pig" dies, either during or very shortly after experimentation—get out a new character sheet.

Any one character may go through this diagnostic process only once. If a character is deemed to have no psychic talent or potential by one body of researchers, he will (practically) never be accepted for testing by a second. The lab can access his records through the net, and he will have been judged a waste of time and effort according to all records. If he is accepted for study again, the character better take a long, hard look at who runs the research at the lab.

A Word to the Wise: Prospective testing "guinea pigs" should remember that if testing proves successful, the party controlling the research institute or laboratory is going to be very interested in maintaining relations (who cares how good or bad?) with the test subject. Refer to the subsection entitled *The Catch* on page 84 of *Cyberpunk 2020* (page 25 of "View From the Edge: The *Cyberpunk* Handbook") for the grisly details.

Number of Talents: If a character is deemed to be psychic, he will only ever have one talent. A character who gains psychic ability during character creation may not undergo experimentation to gain more than one talent.

IMPROVING PSYCHIC ABILITY

A psychic has an ability known as a talent. Talent levels range from a minimum of 1 (the weakest) to a maximum of 10 (the strongest), similar to conventional skills. Although ordinary skills may be improved in

three ways (study and practice, being taught, and experience), a psychic talent may only be increased through experience. The improvement system for psychic talents is identical to that for conventional skills, and all talents have an IP multiplier of 5 (+10 IP cost for 1st edition *Cyberpunk*).

Every psychic character has a beginning talent level of +2.

GENERAL AND COMBAT USE

A psychic may carry out a number of psychic actions per day equal to his Cool stat multiplied by five.

Example: My character's Cool is 8. In any given 24-hour period, he can use his Telekinesis for 40 actions.

One psychic action takes one turn to carry out (one phase in 1st edition *Cyberpunk*). Task basic difficulty modifiers do apply to psychic actions. See page 32 of *Cyberpunk 2020* or page 17 of "A View From the Edge" (1st ed.).

Note: Rather than constantly translating *Cyberpunk 2020* turns as phases in 1st edition *Cyberpunk*, and 1st edition *Cyberpunk* turns as 10 seconds in *Cyberpunk 2020*, simply note this change and apply it throughout the rest of this article.

To carry out any aggressive task with a psychic talent requires the psychic character to make a successful psychic attack roll.

A psychic attack uses the following formula: REF+Talent Level+1D10.

Making a psychic attack counts as an action and takes one turn. Range, terrain, and cover modifiers do not apply to psychic attacks, defenses, or actions except for attacks with projectiles using Telekinesis (see page 70).

When attacked psychically, a character should make a psychic defense roll to avoid the attack's effects. A successful defense results in no effect (a miss).

A psychic defense uses the following formula: REF+(CL+INT+2)+1D10.

Nonpsychics are entitled to psychic defense rolls. Psychic characters may use their talent level for psychic defense rolls, instead of the average of their Intelligence and Cool, if it is higher.

ADDICTIVE DRUGS

The effects of drugs on psychics' abilities can be pretty harsh. Each time a drug-using character fails an addiction save his psychic talent level is reduced by 1D6+2 points permanently (the levels must be repurchased).

Recalculate Psychic Strength (see *Psychic Talent Determination*) accordingly. Further, if talent level drops to zero or below, the character has destroyed his ability entirely. He will no longer be psychic!



ENHANCEMENT

Psychics use their natural bodies as neurological antennae. If the "psychic antennae" is tampered with, a character's ability to use his talent is degraded.

For each cybernetic enhancement implanted, a character's Psychic Strength is decreased equal to the Humanity Cost for the enhancement.

WOUNDS

Wounds damage the psychic antennae just like implants. For each Critical or worse wound a psychic receives, his Psychic Strength is decreased equal to the number of damage points the wound caused. These reductions are permanent. They will only be replaced when a character's talent level goes up (since level increases raise Psychic Strength as well).

PSI DRUGS

Some of the chemicals which have proven useful for producing psychoactivity through laboratory use have been refined into (relatively—ha, ha!) safe drugs. Most of these drugs, when administered by injection to a psychic, will enhance the Psychic Strength of an ESPer's (ESP user's) talent. A few of these chemicals are capable of deadening Psychic Strength.

Psi drugs, as these two groups of chemical derivatives have become known, are only available in the form of injections (liquids). Work is progressing rapidly on the development of psi drug pills and derms.

Enhancement Drugs

Psi enhancement drugs are administered in single doses. Each dose has a rating number. This rating is equal to the number of points by which a psychic's Psychic Strength is increased when given the drug. There is theoretically no upper limit to the rating number a psi enhancement drug can have. Currently however, rating 530 is the highest yet produced by ESPerSRI.

Depressant Drugs

Psi depressant drugs are administered and rated the same way psi enhancers are. A depressant's rating number indicates the number of points of Psychic Strength by which a psychic's talent is decreased, not increased.

There is no known upper limit to a psi depressant's possible rating number.

Use and Abuse

Psi drugs do not increase a psychic's talent level. They have only a euphoric affect on nonpsychic people. This unfortunately makes them much sought-after by common drug addicts, particularly 'Dorphers, as well as legitimate psychics.

Because psi drugs are derived from a number of different chemicals, most of which are mutually destructive, multiple uses of psi drugs in a short period of time are pointless. Their effects are not cumulative. Only the highest-rated injection will have any effect (or only one injection will if they are all the same rating), and the rest will be wasted.

Most psi drugs are effective for a set period of time—typically one hour. All psi drugs are nonaddictive because of the effect drug addiction has on psychics. Some exceptionally unscrupulous organizations, however, to ensure the continuing loyalty of their psionic personnel, lace psi drugs with addictive substances in spite of the effects—they just use their ESPers until they burn them out, then replace them.

Psi drugs are practically impossible to obtain on the street. When they are available, they are extortionately expensive. They typically cost around one Eurodollar per point of rating number.

Very few labs are capable of producing psi drugs, and those that are have insanely tight security. Some do "leak" onto the street though—somehow.

PSYCHIC TALENT DETERMINATION

When you have determined that a character is psionic, roll on the table below to find his talent.

Psychic Talents

D100	Talent
01-25	Telekinesis
26-50	Clairvoyance
51-75	Levitation
76-00	Telepathy

This table can easily be expanded if you want to introduce more talents into your *Cyberpunk* game.

While using any talent, a psychic is fully aware of his immediate surroundings and may move, etc. as normally allowed in the *Cyberpunk* rules.

To determine Psychic Strength for a talent, use the following formula: At each talent level, a psychic character gains Psychic Strength points equal to 1D10 multiplied by the appropriate stat for the talent in question.

Example: My character with Telepathy (page 71) starts out with a Psychic Strength of 91—that is, 13 (2D10 rolls of 6 and 7) multiplied by 7 (initial Empathy) equals 91.

When he reaches talent level +3, his Strength will go up by 21 to 112—that is, 3 (1D10 roll) multiplied by 7 (Empathy) equals 21.

No psychic's Psychic Strength can fall below 1 (except as mentioned above). The formulae for the uses of the various talents requires a Psychic Strength of at least 1.

The Psychic Strength of a new talent at each talent level should be figured by using the most logical stat for it as its base. There is no hard and fast rule for this, though.

Telekinesis (Psychokinesis)

Psychic Strength=1D10 multiplied by Carrying ability (Body Type times 5), per talent level (in kilograms).

General Use: Telekinesis can be used to move any object the psychic can see within the limits of his range. Range is equal to Psychic Strength divided by two (round down) in meters. Telekinesis is only usable on things *visible* to the user. Objects may be lifted; however, for each meter they are raised, one kilogram's worth of Psychic Strength is lost.

Example: My level +5 Telekinetic can move 1015 kilos (Psychic Strength of 1015), so he could lift a 1000-kilogram object 15 meters or a 700-kilogram object 315 meters.

Objects may not be lifted or moved beyond the psychic's range. If this is attempted, the object will fall to the ground as soon as it reaches the psychic's range limit. An object may be moved two meters per talent level per turn. Every turn of Telekinesis use counts as an action against the user's daily action allowance.

Combat Use: Telekinesis can be used to make the following types of Martial Arts and Brawling attacks: disarm, throw, hold, sweep/trip, choke and grapple (1st edition *Cyberpunk*—pins and grapples, breaks, and throws). The damage modifier to damage caused by Telekinetic throws (the 1st edition Strength modifier to damage caused by Telekinetic breaks and throws) is calculated from talent level, not Body Type.

Telekinesis can be used in melee and ranged combat as well. Telekinetics can strike with or hurl objects at their opponents. Damage caused will vary with the objects used. Refer to the tables on pages 52, 54, and 89 in *Cyberpunk 2020* or the Melee Damage Chart at the back of "Friday Night Fire Fight" in 1st edition *Cyberpunk* for ideas. A successful psychic attack roll is required to hit an opponent with Telekinesis.

A Telekinetic may manipulate a number of objects equal to his talent level when making a melee or ranged attack. He still has to make an attack roll for each object he is attacking with. Attacking with multiple objects only counts as one action, and all the objects hit in the same turn (deadly!).

Range and Psychic Strength apply fully to combat use of Telekinesis.

Clairvoyance

Psychic Strength=1D10 multiplied by Intelligence stat per talent level (in meters).

General Use: Clairvoyance is used to "look" in on or "see," a specific location while not there. It can be used to look "through" intervening matter.

Example: The inside of an office building can be seen from outside.

The size of the area which can be viewed is a diameter equal to 10 meters per talent level. Clairvoyance does not enhance light; if the area being viewed is in darkness, the psychic's mental picture will be in darkness. The picture is not movable and lasts for 10 seconds per use (not one turn per use).

No sound is received through Clairvoyance. Because of this, many Clairvoyants learn to lip-read—an IP multiplier 2 language skill which only works in conjunction with other languages a person knows (1st edition *Cyberpunk* Complex Language).

The range of Clairvoyance is equal to Psychic Strength in meters. Each 10 seconds (not turn) spent viewing with Clairvoyance counts as a psychic action. A successful psychic attack roll is required for each 10 seconds of use of this talent.

Combat Use: Clairvoyance has no real combat use except possibly as an intelligence-gathering tool.

Levitation

Psychic Strength=1D10 multiplied by Leaping ability (MA+4 in *Cyberpunk 2020*, Run+10 in 1st edition *Cyberpunk*) per talent level (in meters).

General Use: Levitators will themselves up and rise! A Levitator is "anchored" to his starting point; he does not drift on air or water (if he is submerged) currents. A Levitating psychic rises two meters per talent level per turn. Maximum attainable height above the starting point is the Levitator's Psychic Strength in meters.

Every 10 kilograms beyond the psychic's own body mass which he Levitates reduces his effective Psychic Strength by one meter. The psychic is still limited as to how much he can physically pick up by his Lifting ability (based on Body Type time 5).

No psychic attack roll is required to use Levitation.

Combat Use: Levitation has no real combat value except for gaining a height advantage. Levitation is not usable on other people or objects. However, an ESPer might try to grab someone, go up a few stories, and drop him. Dropped people will usually (if they hit pavement) receive 1D6 points of damage (1st edition, killing damage) for every story (three meters) they fall, divided as evenly as possible among hit locations. Characters with Athletics skill may subtract their skill level from any falling damage they take.

Telepathy

Psychic Strength=1D10 multiplied by Empathy per talent level in meters.

General Use: Telepathy is used to read other peoples' thoughts. Range is equal to Psychic Strength in meters. A successful psychic attack roll is required to read another's mind. A Telepath can read three words per turn per talent level. These will result in meaningful, sought-after sentences of information, not gibberish.

Telepathy may be used to communicate with others' minds as well. The number of words sendable equals three per turn per talent level. A psychic attack roll is required only if the receiver is unwilling to communicate.

Each turn of either sending or receiving requires a psychic attack roll. Telepathy can only be used with people the user can see, hear, touch, or smell.

Combat Use: Telepathy can be used to give a psychic character advance warning of an opponent's intended actions (think of it as a very rapid mind scan). A successful psychic attack roll is required to do this in each turn it is attempted. This results in a bonus to the ESPer's conventional and/or psychic attack and defense rolls equal to his talent level. This "warning bonus" may only be applied to the turn following the turn in which this "scan-link" is established. (In 1st edition *Cyberpunk*, it may only be applied in a "Yes" phase—see "Friday Night Fire Fight"—immediately following the phase in which this scan-link was established with the opponent). It may not be saved for later—if not used immediately, the bonus is lost.

ESPERSRI

A number of governments and corporations are involved in psionics research, but none more than the ESPerSRI.

Main Office: Vancouver.

Regional Offices: Winnipeg, Ottawa, Montreal, Los Angeles, Houston, Washington.

Stock: 407,956 shares.

Available on Market: 37,891 shares.

Name and Location of Major Shareholder: Capt. Roger Klaxxon, US Army, Ret., Vancouver, Canada, holding 52.7% of total shares.

Troops: 539 combat ready.

Covert Operatives: 118 (a number of them are ESPers).

Equipment and Resources: Six AV-4s, three helicopters, two Osprey IIs, 11 airogyros, and two corporate jets are dispersed between ESPerSRI's offices. Due to its US and Canadian government contracts, ESPerSRI has relatively rapid access to most military hardware. All of their troops are well equipped with personal weapons and armor. Each of the offices has a fully

staffed clinic and infirmary. ESPerSRI maintains a top secret research and training facility on one of the Gulf Islands off the southern coast of British Columbia.

Background: ESPerSRI (an acronym from Extrasensory Perception User Studies and Research Institute and pronounced "Esper-S-R-I") was founded by a body of theoretical science proponents, headed by Roger Klaxxon, in 1996. While serving in the US Army, Klaxxon volunteered for, and later became very involved in, experimentation in psychoactivity and human ESPer potential.

By 2000, ESPerSRI had secured extensive contracts with a number of other corporations, as well as the US and Canadian governments, to conduct psionic studies on their behalf.

NPC ESPERS

Nonplayer characters may also be psionic. Due to the circumstances which lead to a person's enhancement to psychic status, most NPC ESPers will be either totally crazy or just extremely paranoid. The tests and chemicals drive most of the psychoactivity diagnostic subjects crazy, and a lot of them are just dumped back into the combat zones to become bums (really dangerous bums). The ones that don't go over the edge are closely watched by their "creators," and if they have escaped or broken a contract, it could be hazardous to your character's health to be caught with them. Then, of course, don't forget the ones that are both crazy and escapees!

Some ESPers were just born that way. Some natural psychics turn to drugs to "quiet the voices." This destroys any talent they have in pretty short order. Most natural psychics, however, are usually very good with their talents (they've had a lot of time to practice). Crossing them can be both dangerous and unwise! However, they can be of the utmost value as contacts and are usually good friends once they decide they can trust



you. You see, a lot of people still get extremely bent out of shape if they know (or even think) you're psychic.

A PSIONIC CAMPAIGN

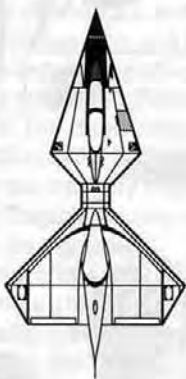
As a referee it isn't a good idea to have a lot of ESPers running around. They aren't very common and are usually very tough hombres who could do a lot of harm to your PCs (especially Telekinetics). Remember that the ones who go violently or antisocially crazy are usually taken out by police cyberpsycho (psiberpsycho?) teams. Err on the side of scarcity with ESPer NPCs—one or two NPC or even PC psychics can really liven up a *Cyberpunk* run without turning it or psionics into mundane roleplaying.

The ESPers in your campaigns should be mysterious and do the unexpected often. If there are psychics in your group their corporate "creators" will probably show up regularly to exact payment for services rendered. That should keep the action going. And after all, isn't the action why we all play *Cyberpunk*? Ω

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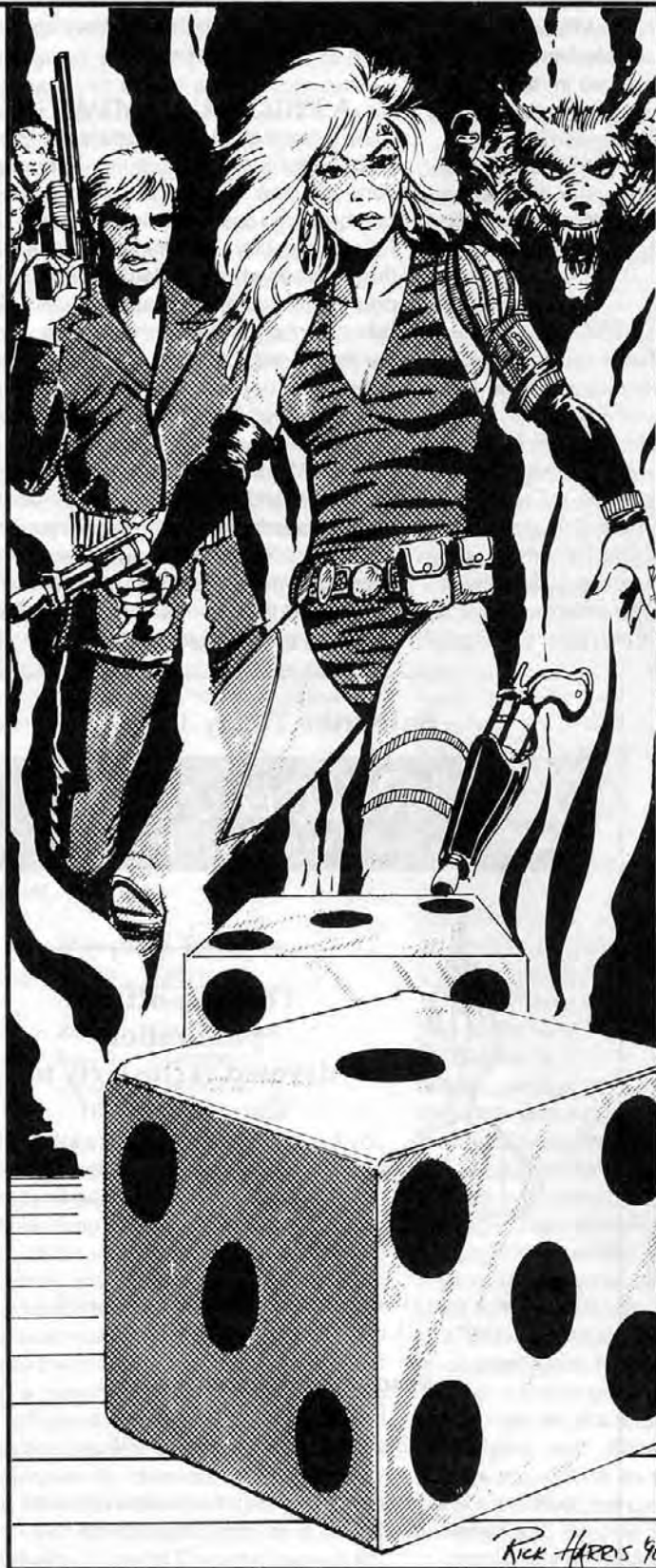
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Character Creation



Martin Wixted

Torg offers 24 character templates for players to choose from. The concept of templates made its first appearance in West End's *Star Wars*, where templates afford players predetermined attributes, equipment, and a character background. The player simply chooses the character's skills, and the game begins. This achieves the laudable goal of allowing the participants the ability to launch almost instantly into action and adventure. In fact, it has proven so successful that other games have emulated this practice (such as *Shadowrun*, with its archetypes).

While this permits new or inexperienced players to begin the game with a minimum of hassle, character templates have the unfortunate side effect of restricting the freedom of more experienced or creative players. This could have been alleviated with a separate set of character creation rules, but *Torg* is already stuffed to the limit with other goodies. Like the *Star Wars* rules, *Torg* was written primarily as a tutorial, and only secondarily as a reference. It was not designed for use at all as a character generating system. This article sets out to correct that by performing the following three functions.

First, this article places all the rules for creating a new character in one place, organized step by step. The necessary rules are currently scattered over 480 pages, between four books.

Second, this compendium fills in the gaps the basic game left open. For example, the rules for nonhumans (vampires and dwarves, for example) aren't explicit, and randomly generating attribute scores is now possible.

Third, I've inserted new rules into the character generation process which are needed to replace a function of the character templates. For example, there are no rules for equipping characters with either starting money or provisions. Such "unofficial" rules are easily spotted, for most lack page references.

GENERATING A CHARACTER

Use the following steps as a guide to character creation. The main paragraph denotes rules common to all realms. Occasional bulleted paragraphs give specific modifiers for particular realms, with page references where applicable. In reference to page numbers, R# indicates the basic *Torg* "Rulebook," W# is the *Torg* "Worldbook," L# is *The Living Land* sourcebook, and N# is *The Nile Empire* sourcebook.

HOME COSM

Choose from one of the seven cosms in the game. Each realm is followed by a few identifying words and its location. Remember that you are not necessarily in that location at the beginning of the game—your referee will define the adventure locales.

Core Earth: Before the Possibility Raiders Wars, this was Earth. Now it is anywhere the Possibility Raiders haven't conquered (W3).

Living Land: A primitive, steamy jungle with carnivorous dinosaurs which inhabit parts of North America (W20).

Aysle: Chivalry and sorcery in service of good Lady Pella Ardayn in the British Isles and the Northern Reaches (W26).

Nippon Tech: Robotic samurai, high-tech ninja, corporate raids, and spies in the Japanese islands (W51).

Cyberpapacy: The antipope with cyberpriests, cybergoyles and the Inquisition infesting France (W33).

Orrorsh: Vampires, werewolves and Victorians in a forever-twilight world overrunning Indonesia (W10).

Nile Empire: Pulp heroes with strange powers and weird science in service to the mad pharaoh of Egypt (W43).

BACKGROUND

Use the accompanying table to generate a past history. Roll on it three or four times, and use the categories to work out a story. Write it on the back of the character sheet (provided later in this article), or use another piece of paper. The story should include your reasons and purpose for becoming a Storm Knight. Glance through *Torg*'s templates for inspiration.

PAST HISTORY GENERATOR (D30)

Die	Result
01	Relocation
02	Gain or loss of family or group
03	Time of rebellion
04	Time of poverty (ideas, time, friends, wealth)
05	Time of illness (emotional, physical)
06	Time of learning
07	Good occupation
08	Weakening/conflict of family or group
09	Strengthening/reconciliation of family or group
10	New significant friend/enemy
11	Time of spiritual fervor
12	Meet someone important to you
13	Identification or solution of major task or problem
14	Initiation into/expulsion from a family or special group
15	Revival of long-dead love/situation/illness/problem
16	Moderate personal loss (ideals, goals, friends, wealth, freedom)
17	Time of conscription/slavery (physical, emotional)
18	Time of philosophical questing
19	Personal conflict (wealth, goals, love, freedom, ideals)
20	Involved/linked to disreputable activity
21	Personal advancement
22	Large material gain
23	Deceit/deception personally affects you
24	Large-scale disaster (natural, financial, spiritual) affects you
25	Make journey out of necessity/gain
26	Family or group member has injury/problem/secret
27	The center of public/private recognition/notoriety
28	Time of renewal, celebration, joy
29	Time of wealth (ideas, friends, things)
30	Time of deep love (person, place, thing, situation)

CHARACTER CONNECTIONS

The players, as a group, must decide how they know each other. A character doesn't necessarily know all the other members of the group, but there should be at least one link to another Storm Knight. Players should have free reign when it comes to connections, and all participants need to agree upon the connection. The referee can contribute to the selection of a connection, but the final decision is the players'. Here are some possible connections (R10):

Called: Called by a deity, message, or destiny.

Employee: One character might have employed another.

Escaped Together: Characters from the same cosm.

Previous Missions: May have worked together before.

Previous or Current Institution: May have spent time at the

same university, company or military group.

Relatives: Not necessarily close, but obligation is high.

Reputation: May have been sought out due to reputation.

Romance: The characters are emotionally involved or perhaps even married.

Same Home Town: Character are from the same area or home town.



ATTRIBUTES

Attributes may be generated in one of two ways: assigned or rolled. Use the assigned attributes method when you have a specific character conception in mind. The rolled attributes method gives truly random results, from 31 to 101 attribute points, averaging out at 66 attribute points.

An attribute of 6 is poor and usually considered the minimum for a character, 8 is human average, 9 is average for a Storm Knight, and 13 is the human maximum (R8, R141).

Assigned Method: You have 66 points to distribute among the seven attributes.

Rolled Method: Roll 2d6+1 for each attribute, in order. Then assign 10 extra points among the seven attributes.

● Living Land Edeinos are allowed Toughness up to 14, due to natural armor.

● Orrorsh shapeshifters have two separate sets of attributes. The Spirit attribute must be the same for both forms (W17).

● Nile characters may have one attribute rated at 14 (W45).

● Nile characters may spend attribute points to increase the rating of a Power (N69).

● Nile Powers may affect a character's attributes (N73).

● Ayle nonhuman characters can have different attribute maximums than humans. The three categories are Adrenalin (DEX, STR, TOU), Willpower (PER, MIN), and Presence (CHA, SPI). If the species has a category listed, any or all of that category's attributes may be as high as 14, instead of the normal limit of 13.

Character choices include Elves (Willpower), Dwarves (Adrenalin), Gnomes (Presence), and half-folk such as Minotaurs (Adrenalin), Merfolk (Presence), and Centaurs (Adrenalin).

● Orrorsh shapeshifters, when in animal form, can have different attribute maximums than humans, as do other inhuman denizens of Orrorsh. The three categories of attributes are Adrenalin (DEX, STR, TOU), Willpower (PER, MIN), and Presence (CHA, SPI). Any or all of that category's attributes may be as high as 14. And, unique among *Torg* characters, one single wereattribute in that category may be as high as 15.

Players choose a form for their werecharacter and decide what the creature's highest category is. Werecreatures include weretigers (Adrenalin), werefalcons (Willpower), werewolves (Adrenalin), and werehawks (Willpower).

● Orrorsh vampires may purchase the Nile Fear, Super Attribute, and/or Dispersal Powers as if they, themselves, were Nile characters (N70). Alternately, they may choose one of the shapeshifting forms of rat, wolf, or bat instead of any Nile Powers. This allows players to recreate vampires from any number of literary sources.

SKILLS

All characters have 16 initial skill points ("adds") to distribute among skills. No skill can be given more than three adds. The attribute value plus adds equals the skill value.

At least one skill must be assigned three adds (the character's Tag

Skill). All characters must have at least one add in Reality skill, which is used in the game to define the strength of the character's tie to his home reality (R141).

The *Torg* novel *Storm Knights* explains that all invaders have been enabled by their High Lord to speak and understand Earth tongues. Therefore, characters speak English (and their native tongue, if any). Language skill is used to learn foreign languages (R55).

In the following list, boldface skills cannot be used unskilled. Italic (and bold italic) skills are specifically combat skills (R49).

SKILL LIST (R49)

CHARISMA

Charm
Persuasion
Taunt

DEXTERITY

Acrobatics
Beast Riding
Dodge
Energy Weapons
Fire Combat
Flight
Heavy Weapons
Lock Picking
Long Jumping
Maneuver
Melee Weapons
Missile Weapons
Prestidigitation
Running
Stealth
Swimming
Unarmed Combat

SPIRIT

Faith
Focus
Intimidation
Reality

PERCEPTION

Air Vehicles
Alteration Magic
Divination Magic
Evidence Analysis
Find
First Aid
Land Vehicles
Language
Scholar (specific)
Space Vehicles
Tracking
Trick
Water Vehicles

MIND

Apportation Magic
Artist (specific)
Conjuration Magic
Medicine
Science
Survival
Test of Wills
Willpower

STRENGTH

Climbing
Lifting

Occult Lore
Religion (specify)
Chemistry
Archaeology
Military Theory
Botany
Liberal Arts
Street Knowledge

Politics
Literature
Biology
Physics
Zoology
Group Behavior
U.S. Popular Culture
Engineering: Naval, Structural, Electrical, or Nuclear

Artist (specific) skill requires a concentration. Some possibilities are:

Drawing
Sculpting
Painting
Dancing
Writing
Acting

POSSIBILITIES

All characters receive 10 Possibility Points ("Possibilities") (R141) to use during the game to reduce wounds, boost skill attempts, and alter reality.

● Any magic-using character may spend Possibilities to buy additional Arcane Knowledges and spells (R113).

● Nile characters may use Possibilities to purchase Powers (N68).

● Orrorsh vampires may use Possibilities to purchase the Fear, Super Attribute and/or Dispersal Powers (N70) (see also Attributes, page 73).

MOVEMENT RATES

Characters move at speeds measured by the value of their attributes. However, there are limits. The Character Limit Chart defines these limits. If your character's attribute is equal to or less than the Limit Value, use the attribute. If your attribute is greater than the Limit Value, use the Limit Value (R42).

CHARACTER LIMITS

Activity	Based On	Limit Value
Running	Dexterity	10
Swimming	Dexterity	6
Long jumping	Dexterity	3
Climbing	Strength	2
Lifting	Strength	9

● Nile characters who choose the Flying, Jump, Running, Swimming, or Wall Walking Power use their Power value as their Limit Value (N68). This is an exception to the standard flight rules (R44).

OTHER STATISTICS

A human's weight is quite variable, so a character's weight value is within two points of his Toughness (R41). Characters with a TOU value greater than 13 are treated as if they have a 13 for the purposes of weight determination. Your referee may waive this for characters in wereanimal form.

Choose an age, height and gender. None of these statistics have a rules-based effect. For players who prefer random determination of gender, if the character's STR is greater than TOU, the character is male; otherwise, the character is female.

● Nile Storm Knights must indicate "Good Inclination" on their character sheet (N61).

AXIOM LEVELS

All cosms have four axiom levels: Magical, Social, Spiritual, and Technical. List your home cosm levels on your character sheet (R97).

● Living Land characters may choose Direction Sense (PER) (L66).
● Aysle Dwarves may choose the nonmagical aspects of the Nile Engineering (MIN) skill (N64).

● Nippon Tech martial artists may choose **Martial Arts** (DEX) which costs three skill points for the first add, Disguise (PER), and Meditation (MIN) (W54).

● Cyberpapacy Storm Knights may choose **Cyberdeck Operation** (PER) (W36).

● Orrorsh werecreatures must take the **Shapeshifting** (SPI) skill as their Tag Skill (W17).

● Nile heroes may choose **Egyptian Religion** (PER), **Hieroglyphics** (PER), **Mathematics** (PER), **Engineering** (MIN), **Hypnotism** (MIN), and **Weird Science** (MIN) (N64).

● Nile Powers may increase the number of skill points a character receives (N73).

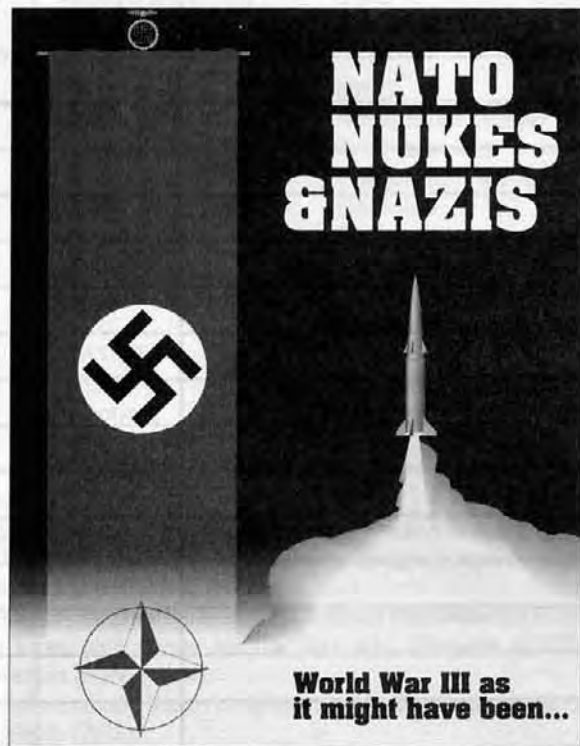
● Any magic-using characters receive a special set of 12 points to buy Arcane Knowledges and spells (R113).

Scholar (specific) skill requires a concentration. Some possibilities are:

Arcane Lore
Philosophy
Business
Mythic Lore
Computer Science
Geology

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HOME COSM AXIOM LEVELS

Cosm	Magic	Social	Spiritual	Technical
Core Earth	7	21	9	23
Living Land	0	7	24	7
Aysle	18	18	16	15
Nippon Tech	2	22	8	24
Cyberpapacy	10	18	14	26
Orrorsh	15	20	17	19
Nile Empire	12	20	17	21

EQUIPMENT AND FINANCES

Every character has material with which to face the world of the Possibility Wars. The following rules are based on an analysis of the *Torg* character templates, the equipment listed for each template type, and the apparent socioeconomic levels of each realm.

Every piece of equipment in the *Torg* game has a listing of "Price (Value)". When purchasing items, you spend your Initial Value Units on the Value Number, and ignore the Price.

For example, a jeep has a "Price (Value)" of 6000 (19). It costs 19 Value Units to purchase the jeep.

Caveat: Do not confuse this use of values with the value number of a skill or the damage value of weapons. There is no place on the character sheet to list Initial Value Units.

Initial Value Units and Availability: All characters receive a certain number of Initial Value Units ("Value Units") to purchase equipment, as listed. As a rule, equipment listed in the basic rulebook at, or up to four points below, your character's tech level is available for purchase. For example, Core Earthers have a tech level of 23, which gives them a range of 19-23. The standard exceptions to this are Aysle characters, who may choose from Tech levels of 5-15, and Nile characters, who may choose from Tech levels 15-22. (Note that tools of tech level 22 are greater than the Nile tech level of 21 and will trigger contradictions in the hands of a Nile character.)

If your referee allows you to purchase items outside this range, use the item's Value Number as the difficulty number against your character's skill in Persuasion or Scholar (Street Knowledge). You reroll on a 10 or 20, and may spend Possibilities but not play Drama Cards. Success means your character has managed to procure the item (you must still pay for it, of course). Your referee may wish to use the General Results Table for these special items, with a Minimal Success meaning that you find a poor-quality item, Average meaning just that, and so on (R132).

Each item listed in the General Gear Chart that your referee permits you to purchase costs 1 Value Unit (R134).

Value Units may not be traded, loaned or given away.

Maximum Remaining: Maximum Remaining is the maximum number of Value Units the character may retain after buying equipment and then translate into actual cash. Any excess Value Units not spent are discarded. Note that Edeinos characters may not keep any Value Units, because credit is a foreign concept to them.

VALUE UNITS FOR EQUIPMENT AND CASH PURPOSES

Realm	Initial Value Units	Maximum Remaining
Core Earth	50	15
Living Land	25	—
Aysle	50	15
Nippon Tech	50	20
Cyberpapacy	100	20
Orrorsh	40	14
Nile Empire	40	14

● Living Land Edeinos subtract 10 Initial Value Units.

● Cyberpapacy characters subtract 50 Initial Value Units if not

buying cybernetics.

● After any other adjustments are made (such as noncybernetic cyberpapiests), all magic users halve their Initial Value

Units. Some referees may wish to rule that magic-using characters cannot purchase armor, if they feel that spells are very potent.

● Characters subtract 10 from Initial Value Units if they have used Possibilities or attribute points to purchase/increase Nile Powers.



CASH ON HAND

Apply the listed Exchange Rate to your character's remaining Value Units. Since all "Price (Value)" amounts are based on US dollars, this adjusts the value for each realm's specific monetary unit.

Finally, reference the modified number on the *Torg* Value Chart to determine the character's pocket money. This money is in his native currency. In the case of Nippon Tech and Cyberpapacy characters, it is a bank account card. These cards are used in lieu of paper or coin money.

Individual referees must decide the difficulty of exchanging realm currencies, especially between electronic credit such as Nippon Tech and hard currency such as Nile Empire Royals.

CASH ON HAND

Character's Realm	Exchange Rate	Realm Currency
Core Earth	0	Dollar
Living Land	—	—
Aysle	+2	Trade
Nippon Tech	+5	Yen
Cyberpapacy	+4	Franc
Orrorsh	-4	Sterling
Nile Empire	-5	Royal

THE NEW CHARACTER SHEET

The *Torg* character sheet (Mk II) offers several refinements when compared to the one included in the basic game.

The top line on the character sheet groups together all "real world" character information (which now includes a space for gender). The second line emphasizes the link between the character's home realm and the cosm ratings.

The three categories of attributes are clearly marked (Adrenalin, Willpower, and Presence). The Drama Deck uses these classifications, but the old character sheet doesn't point them out.

Shock damage and Wounds are more clearly based on Toughness, and the Possibilities box is next to the other two items whose statistics vary throughout a game.

There is never enough room to write in the name of character skills, but combining the reference to the governing attribute and skill adds gives a little more space. Players may also wish to use the first three letters of the attribute as a shorthand (i.e., SPI would be Spirit).

Equipment is now more properly called "Tools," and includes cybernetic gear and Nile gadgets in addition to the more traditional equipment, money and weapons. (Players can use a second line to list a weapon's range.)

The Bonus Chart has the numbers 10 and 20 circled to remind players that they (usually) reroll on those results. And the numbers 1-4 are boxed in to remind players of those awful Contradiction checks.

(The double "-8" Bonus Number category is deliberate, and is simply displayed that way to make the Contradiction box less intrusive.) Ω

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The Ultra-Tech File

David L. Pulver

Ultra-Tech is a manual of futuristic equipment by David Pulver for Steve Jackson Game's *GURPS Space* and *GURPS Supers* workbooks. This article details several gadgets left out due to space constraints and adds a few new ones, along with errata and optional rules.

TECH LEVEL 8 EQUIPMENT

Mini-GL: Designed to be mounted under the barrel of any TL8+ rifle or carbine (including energy weapons), the mini-GL is a small electromagnetic grenade launcher which uses a powerful magnetic impulse to accelerate a grenade sheathed in a metal sabot. It is subsonic and virtually silent. Its magazine holds three grenades; its C cell has enough power to fire 15 grenades. Reloading a single grenade takes one second.

Mal: Crit Type: Spcl Dam: Spcl SS: 10 Acc: 7 1/2 D: — Max: 500 Wt: 4 RoF: 1 Shots: 3 Rcl: 0 Cost: \$1000 LC: 0 TL: 8.

Flechette Grenades: Flechette grenades are fired from grenade launchers or emplaced as mines. Each grenade contains scores of tiny steel needles which are released directionally, like a giant shotgun. Damage is 8d+8 impaling (but use the shotgun rules, p. B119, so the effect is actually 8 attacks at 1d+1 each), 1/2D is 80, and Max is 200. Other stats (SS, Accuracy, etc.) are the same as the grenade launcher. If a flechette mine is detonated, use a default skill of 9 to determine its hit chance. \$30, Legality 0.

Laser-Guided Mortar Shells: Smart bombs for the electromag mortar are available for an extra \$50 each. A laser designator or active designator must be aiming continuously at the target to guide the shells in. If the designator's operator makes his Gunner roll and the shells are fired on a trajectory that takes them within line of sight of their target, they automatically hit the designated hex (cluster bombs will be released around that hex). If the designator fails his Gunner roll, the shells will miss by one hex per point the roll failed by—roll for scatter as for grenades. Legality 0.

Industrial Waterknife: This waterknife resembles a bladeless hacksaw connected to a water main or backpack pump, and uses a hypervelocity water jet as a blade. The water contains a suspension of glass, sand or diamond dust. The water (and grit) is recycled, but there is some wastage—the tank must be refilled after an hour of cutting. Designed to cut metal or industrial plastics, the waterknife does 3d+2 cutting damage and is used as a saw in the same way as a vibroblade. It is powered by a C cell for 12 hours of use. A waterknife may be used at DX-4 as a weapon; reach is 1. \$160, 8 pounds, Legality 5.

Tacscanner: A handheld radar unit the size of a hardcover book, a tacscanner is

used to detect objects and to determine their speed, course and range. It has no screen, instead displaying information via a holographic projection or via datalink to a computer terminal or helmet HUD. It may scan a specific 60° arc every second or display a 360° field at 1/5 range. It detects moving man-sized targets or stationary vehicles at two miles, moving vehicles at up to five miles, and low-flying aircraft or spacecraft at up to 20 miles. The radar's range may be increased by 10% per point by which an Electronics Operations (Sensor) skill roll is made. Tacscanners have developed double the above range at TL9, and double again at TL10. A tacscanner cannot detect targets that are over the horizon or behind cover. It works two weeks on a C cell. \$2000, 4 pounds, Legality 5.

ECM Pack: This system consists of a backpack-mounted detector/jammer and attached keyboard control unit; it must be linked to a helmet HUD or computer display screen to be used. The ECM pack detects all operating radars and standard (radio) communicators (but not laser or neutrino communications) within twice their range on a successful Electronics Operations (Sensor)+4 roll using the operator's skill or the integral computer's default skill of 12. An ECM pack can also be set to jam portable radars and radios within five miles, but it has no effect on powerful (e.g., starship-mounted) systems. To get through its jamming, a radar operator or com user must roll a quick contest of skills using Electronics Operation (Sensors or Communications) against the ECM pack operator (or the integral computer's) Electronics Operation (Sensors)/TL skill. If a system is of a higher TL, add 4 per TL of superiority to its user's skill, plus modifiers if larger and more powerful ECMs or radars/radios are involved on either side. If the roll succeeds, the user may communicate or scan clearly for the next minute. If it fails, sensors or communications are jammed for at least a minute, after which another roll may be made. A TL12+ ECM pack can jam gravity-ripple communications. Tachyon, neutrino, laser, and maser communications still cannot be jammed. \$8000, 20 pounds, Legality 4.

Lasercom: A lasercom is a tight-beam laser communicator/receiver with orbital (200-mile) range (though on the ground it is limited by the horizon—usually five miles or so—and intervening obstacles). An operator can overcome this range limitation by bouncing the laser beam off a reflector or by using a relay satellite or spaceship. Alternatively, the operator can try to bounce the laser beam off thick clouds. This enables the user to send a message over the horizon but will spread the signal over a 200-yard radius, enabling anyone with a lasercom to pick up the message. Signal quality will be degraded by bouncing it off clouds: Make an

Electronics Operations (Communications) roll to pick up the signal. Range is reduced to a maximum of 10 miles. Unlike standard radio communicators, a lasercom cannot be jammed or intercepted, but its beam is blocked by anything that would normally block a laser—smoke, thick clouds, etc. If the lasercom has a blue-green frequency (\$200 extra), it can transmit effectively to and from underwater locations.

Lasercoms must be tripod-mounted and attached to a computerized tracking system to communicate with fast-moving aircraft and ground vehicles or ships and satellites in orbit. The GM may require an Electronics Operations (Communications) roll to initially align the laser, with modifiers based on the relative speed of the moving vehicle (use the Speed/Range Table in the *GURPS Basic Set*). Each attempt takes 10 seconds. A laser communicator can be converted into a weapons-grade laser with 30 minutes of work and an electronics tool kit. Doing so requires an Electronics (Weapons)/TL skill roll. Failure takes another half hour; critical failure breaks the device. A converted lasercom fires as a laser rifle but with -3 ACC and +3 SS. It malfunctions on a roll of 16+; each shot drains one hour of power. A lasercom uses a C cell for one hour of communication, costs \$3000, and weighs 12 pounds. The tripod tracking system (TTS) uses a B cell, weighs 20 pounds, and takes up one cubic yard if unfolded. It takes 30 seconds to set up. \$2000, Legality 6.

Helmet Lasercom: This is a short-range (10 miles or line of sight, whichever is less), helmet-mounted laser communicator/receiver unit. It may be built into any HUD-equipped helmet. It functions in exactly the same way as the larger lasercom but is much easier to aim (+4 to skill). The user simply looks at whoever he wants to talk to (assuming they also have a lasercom system) and uses the helmet's HUD to aim the communications beam. The helmet lasercom system costs \$1000 (not including HUD) to install in a helmet. 4 pounds, Legality 6.

Laser Reflector: A tripod-mounted, computer-controlled mirror used to "bounce" laser beams, the laser reflector is intended for laser surveying or as a relay for a lasercom. It may also reflect weapon laser beams (but not X-ray or gamma-ray lasers). The mirror may be used as cover; any visible-light laser beam of 4d or less damage that strikes the mirror will be reflected back on a roll of 16 or less, bouncing back to its source on a roll of 6 or less. More powerful beams destroy the mirror. If the reflector is being manually controlled, a successful Electronics Operations (Communications)/TL roll may be used to reflect the beam as desired. Failure reflects it randomly; a critical failure also destroys the mirror. The device is powered by a

B cell which lasts for a year. It weighs 40 pounds and takes up 0.2 of a cubic yard of volume folded and two cubic yards unfolded. It takes 10 seconds to set up. \$3000, Legality 6.

Cosmetic Program: TL8+ communicators with video or holographic screens can have this feature built into them. When a cosmetic program is running, a TV camera picks up the communicator's features as usual, but before transmitting it adjusts them to match those of a preprogrammed "ideal." The user still looks like himself, but blemishes are erased: Sagging jowls are corrected, crow's feet removed, etc. In game terms, the user's Appearance is raised by one level (up to the maximum possible). A cosmetic program costs an extra \$400 at TL8. It is Legality 4. For \$800, the program can be designed to give the user anyone else's features and to disguise his voice as well.

Slipspray: Slipspray is a polymer spray which produces a nearly frictionless surface. The formula was originally a commercial lubricant, but adventurers have found other uses for it! Anyone moving at more than one yard a second who enters a slipsprayed hex must make a DX roll (at +3 if crawling, -3 if sprinting) for each hex entered to avoid slipping and falling prone. A can of slipspray can cover seven hexes (with a spray range of two yards). If using *GURPS Autoduel*, slipspray is a skill-6 hazard for vehicles. \$15, 1/2 pound per can. Legality 5.

Pressure Box: This pressurized container (1x1x1 foot) is useful for carrying fragile items (or pets!) through vacuum. It includes space for an air tank and has its own life-support pack, and it may be fitted with other accessories. Several boxes can be linked together to form a larger container (this takes 10 seconds/box). A pressure box has DR 3 and takes up .1 cubic yard. \$400, 4 pounds, Legality 6.

Hoverplat: This small, flat, two-foot-diameter cart floats on an air cushion, enabling it to be towed or pushed with ease. These devices are often seen around starports for moving cargo and luggage, but may also be used by explorers to carry gear. They carry 500 pounds at normal walking movement rate over smooth ground or water, and run off a D cell for two weeks. \$300, 20 pounds, Legality 6.

Catalyst Crystals: These crystallized beverages (soup, coffee, tea, etc.) produce a chemical reaction when dropped into water, quickly bringing it to a boil. Each packet (good for one cup) weighs four ounces. \$4, Legality 6.

Clothing Fabricator: A clothing fabricator automatically produces clothing of different cuts, weights, patterns and colors, using a simple laser scanning booth to tailor and fit it to an individual. It is voice controlled. A holographic projector shows what the user would look like in various selections. Fitting and tailoring can take as little as 15 minutes, or much longer if the user can't make up his mind. The cost of the fabric will be around 10% of a normal suit of clothing, and though the fabricator is limited to the kind of materials it has in storage, it can also wash, clean, fit, modify or even recycle old clothes. It runs off building power or operates for a week on

a D cell. \$15,000, 0.5 of a cubic yard, 400 pounds, Legality 6.

Deepsleep Box: Lulls a character into deeper sleep with an electromagnetic field ("electronic narcosis") and a soothing sound which it generates. The character remains asleep as long as the box's electrodes are in place, but a timer is usually set for personal use. Six hours of deepsleep are equivalent to eight hours of normal sleep. It is used in hospitals to soothe patients, by everyday citizens to ensure a good night's sleep, or by various forces to assure a cooperative captive. It runs for three months off a B cell. \$500, 2 pounds, Legality 6.

TECH LEVEL 9 EQUIPMENT

Lightsword: Lightswords are not energy blades. They are wand-shaped laser pistols designed to fire a continuous beam lasting for an entire second, giving them a RoF of 16. The beam can be swept back and forth like an infinite-range sword (hence the name) or held directly on one target. They are favorite dueling weapons among the upper classes of some cultures. With more shots (but less damage) than an automatic fire-modified laser pistol, they make a fair military sidearm as well. Remember to use the laser autofire rules to determine damage, adding the damage together from all shots that hit before subtracting DR—this means that a lightsword can do 16d damage if all shots hit! Lightswords cannot be hotshot.

A lightsword has the following statistics—**Mal:** Crit Type: Cut **Damage:** 1d SS: 5 ACC: 10 1/2D: 200 Max: 500 Wt: 2 pounds RoF: 16 Shots: 48/C ST: — Rcl: 0 Cost: \$3000 LC: 2.

Dueling lightswords are often ornate and bejeweled, increasing their cost to \$5000 or more. At TL10, X-ray versions exist doing 1d+1 (2) damage (i.e., halving DR). At TL14, gamma-ray lightswords are available, doing 2d+2 (5) damage and having 64 shots. All X-ray and graser lightswords are Legality 0.

Gauss Pistol: A gauss pistol is a gauss bullet weapon (*Ultra-Tech*, p. 51). Slightly smaller than a gauss SMG, this long-barrelled pistol uses an electromagnetic impulse to accelerate a high-caliber bullet to hypersonic velocities. A 60-shot magazine, including C cell, costs \$130 and weighs two pounds. It may fire explosive or sabotaged ammunition (see *Ultra-Tech*, p. 20) at increased cost.

Mal: Crit Type: Cr. **Damage:** 4d SS: 8 ACC: 7 1/2D: 200 Max: 600 RoF: 12 Shots: 60/C ST: — Rcl: 0 Cost: \$2000 TL: 9 LC: 2.

Infantry Rocket Launcher: The companion weapon to the heavier IML, the IRL is a shoulder-fired, infantry-support rocket launcher, firing a small, "clever," laser-guided missile. The IRL is not reloadable—the launcher is thrown away after it is fired.

Use the rules for clever missile grenades to determine hit probability; the gunner can laser designate for his own missile by clamping an active laser designator onto the launch tube, or the rocket can be guided by someone else. The IRL missile's warhead inflicts

GURPS

a 6d+4 (10) explosion. The weapon has an RoF of 1, 1/2D range is 750, and Max range is 1000. The infantry rocket launcher can also be fired without taking time to use laser designation; if so, treat it as SS: 15 Acc: 10.

\$500, 5 pounds (including rocket), Legality 0.

Light Combat Armor: Light combat armor is a fully airtight, multienvironmental suit, similar in design to infantry combat armor, but made of lighter nonmetallic plastic and synthetic materials. It is worn by military and paramilitary personnel, such as ship or vehicle crews, who don't need the full protection—and weight—of heavier armor but do require pressurized armor more resistant to damage than a civilian vacc suit. It has DR 30 in the torso (9-11, 17-18). Arms (6,8) and legs (12-16) are PD 3, DR 20. The helmet provides PD 4 and DR 25 for the head (3-5), except for the faceplate (location 5, frontally) and gloves (7), which are PD 3, DR 15. At higher TLs, LCA gains +10 DR per TL over 9 in each location. Because light combat armor is not metallic, it does not provide PD 8 against disruptor weapons. Light combat armor weighs only 22 pounds. It costs \$1200, including the helmet. The helmet alone weighs two pounds and costs \$200, but additional accessories are usually added at extra cost and weight. Light combat armor takes 30 seconds to put on and 20 to remove, or half that time on a successful Vacc Suit skill roll. Legality 1.

ACV-IFV: This air-cushion vehicle (hovercraft) is a TL9 infantry fighting vehicle designed to carry a squad of soldiers into battle. It can transport six armored soldiers plus a driver and a gunner at a speed of 100 mph across land or water (half that over rough terrain). It cannot cross an obstacle over six feet high. It is armed with a remote-controlled turret fitted with an eight-barrelled Gatling laser (treat as a normal Gatling laser, but with unlimited shots and an RoF of 8) and an M-LAWS missile launcher. It has its own minicomputer with Gunner, Targeting, Expert System: Tactics, and Piloting programs allowing limited "autonomous" operation—i.e., the vehicle can drive and shoot on its own, but only to move to preprogrammed locations or fire against anyone firing at it. Other electronics include laser sensors, IR cloaking, long-range communicator, multiscanner, tacscanner and ECM pack.

Since the ACV-IFV is about eight yards long and three yards wide, it may be attacked at +4 to hit from the side, above or below, and at +1 from all other angles. It can withstand 450 hit points of damage before the vehicle is disabled and cannot move, but a single hit inflicting 150 or more damage points will also cripple it. The turret has only

20 hit points; a single hit doing 40 or more points disables it, but it is a small target (-2 to hit). With TL9 missiles and even mortar bomblets capable of maneuvering to strike any aspect of a vehicle, tanks no longer restrict most of their armor to their fronts. The ACV-IFV is no exception, and has PD 8, DR 500 in front and on the turret, and PD 6, DR 400 on rear, right and left sides and deck. Its underside is PD 3, DR 100. The ACV-IFV normally relies on the armor's PD to avoid attacks, but a skilled hovercraft pilot can jink and weave, making the vehicle harder to hit. Use Driving (Hovercraft)/4 (round down)+PD to dodge an attack. An ACV-IFV's Gatling laser is usually slaved to its point-defense computer program, which is programmed to kill any incoming missile or grenade on a roll of 14 or less if the missile was launched at least 100 yards away (the roll is modified by ± 2 per TL of difference between the computer and the missile). The gun can only kill two missiles per turn (-4 to hit the second missile) and can't fire at a missile if it was already used against another target by the gunner. The ACV-IFV costs about \$500,000; its fusion plant operates it for one month before it needs refueling. It weighs 40 tons and takes up 64 cubic yards. It is Legality 0—only military forces will be able to acquire it.

TL 10 Variant: Use X-ray Gatling laser and TL10 missiles. Add a neutrino communicator and chameleon camouflage circuits, and double the armor DR. Speed rises to 120 mph, and fusion jump jets now enable the IFV to hover 10 feet off the ground for up to two minutes. Until a TL9+ GURPS vehicle design system appears, the ACV-IFV may serve as a model for other TL8-10 armored vehicles.

Plasma Torch: A close-focus hand flamer for heavy cutting and welding, the plasma torch does 10d of damage to doors, bulkheads, etc. Damage is cumulative per turn to cut through tough materials. It can be used in combat as a beam weapon at Flamer-3. Its statistics when used as such are: SS: 8 Acc: 2 1/2D: 3 Max: 10 RoF: 1.

It uses a D cell which lasts for 60 seconds and can be replaced in five turns. \$2200, 12 pounds, Legality 5.

Sonic Restraint Band: Used legally by police, prison guards and hospitals, a sonic restraint band projects a soothing ultrasonic field into the wearer's brain, keeping him sedated without injury to the wearer or the risks associated with drugs. The device is activated by a remote-control unit (\$100, range as short-range communicator) with two settings: sleep and control. A single remote can control a dozen headbands. When the restraint band is set to "sleep," the wearer is placed in a deep sleep from which he cannot be awakened until the device is removed or turned off.

When the restraint band is set to "control," the headband projects frequencies that allow the user to retain consciousness while suppressing aggressive tendencies, making the subject easily led. The wearer is

treated as if he suffered from both the Combat Paralysis and Gullibility disadvantages. The device can be resisted—after it is activated, the wearer gets an HT-3 roll (modified by Will) each turn to avoid succumbing to the effects. Once a roll is failed, the effects persist for as long as the device remains on. It runs for 24 hours on a B cell.

\$400, 1/2 pound, Legality 5.

Verifier: Lie detection systems often suffer from a common disadvantage—the subject is aware that he is being tested. An aware subject may attempt to fool the detector, or his general nervousness at being monitored may give false readings. The verifier avoids this problem by using bioscanner technology to monitor the subject's physiological state (heartbeat, EEG, perspiration, voice stress, etc.) continuously from a distance; as a result, the subject may not even be aware that he is being scanned, reducing the margin of error. The verifier has a range of five yards and is no larger than a pack of cigarettes. It can be concealed in normal clothing or disguised as another device. It gives +5 to Detect Lies or Interrogation skill on rolls to spot deliberate lies and misinformation; this bonus is reduced to +2 if the subject becomes aware (or guesses) that a verifier is in use. A verifier requires a minimum Electronics Operations (Medical)/TL skill of 12 or better to operate. It will work up to three months continuously on a B cell. \$1200, 1 pound, Legality 4.

TECH LEVEL 10 EQUIPMENT

IPAWS (Tripod Blaster): Essentially a semiportable blaster, the infantry particle accelerator weapon system fires a high-energy electron bolt along a path burned through atmosphere by a laser beam. It is too heavy to be used by a normal person. It was designed as a sidearm for a single man in powered combat armor and is intended for use against heavily armored opponents.

Mal: Crit. **Type:** Imp. **Dam:** 7dx4 1/2D: 1500 **Max:** 2500 **RoF:** 3 **Rec:** -2 **Shots:** 200/E **ST:** 20 **Wt:** 40 **Cost:** \$25,000 **LC:** 0.

A tripod-mount variant is available for nonpowered infantry or vehicles. No ST is required to use the weapon while it is on its tripod, but it weighs 50 pounds and takes three turns to set up.

Bioplas Armor: Resembling a skintight bodystocking, bioplas armor is made of living, electrically active bioplastic (see *GURPS Ultra-Tech*, p. 71). It can be worn under normal clothing, and it "breathes," making it very comfortable to wear. Bioplas armor has PD 3 and DR 15. As with other equipment made of bioplastic, bioplas armor that has access to moisture and heat (e.g., from sweat and body heat) can regrow itself, healing rips and tears. A full suit covering the entire body except for the head weighs three pounds and costs \$2000; a vest weighs one pound and costs \$800. More sophisticated forms of bioplastic armor are also available—see *Reflex Armor*, *GURPS Ultra-Tech*, p. 76. Because it is skintight, self-repairing and easily concealable, bioplas armor is a

favorite material. Legality 4.

Paratronic Key: A pen-sized device that projects a short-range (eight-inch) electromagnetic pulse similar to that of a paralysis gun, but is intended to open electronic locks by either disrupting the locking mechanism or projecting a coded series of electromagnetic pulses. It gives a +3 on Lockpicking or Security Systems skill to open any lock of TL9+; lower TL electronic locks are always opened. The beam can also be used to disrupt other electronic systems.

If set on "high" (one shot which burns out the power cell), it can paralyze a person or short out an electrical device; stats are identical to a normal paralysis gun, except SS is 5, Acc is 0, and Range is 1. The HT roll to resist is HT+2. It uses a B cell, which lasts for 20 uses. \$800, 4 ounces, Legality 3.

TECH LEVEL 11 EQUIPMENT

Seeker Missile Launcher (SML): Seeker missiles are slightly larger than a human arm and weigh three pounds. They are guided by miniature bioscanners, radscanners, or chemscanners, and are armed with explosive, chemical or (rarely) nuclear warheads. The seeker missile is the standard TL11 and TL12 guided missile; seekers are used less often at TL13, mainly because bioscanners and chemseekers cannot detect a target through a force screen. The missiles incorporate a sophisticated inertial guidance system enabling them to be launched from beyond visual range. The gunner simply programs the missile to fly for a certain distance and then hunt for a target. The missile skims low over the ground until it reaches that point, then pops up and activates its sensors, locking onto and attacking the nearest object within range that matches its programming. No target designation is required.

Three types of missile are available: Bioseekers home on human-sized life forms; radseekers scan for neutrino emissions from robot, battlesuit or vehicle power plants; and chemseekers lock onto large chunks of high-density metal (like BPC armor). But these are simply the "default" settings. Each type of missile's brain is programmed with the characteristics of over 100 target categories. The gunner can use the launcher's computer to change the settings on a missile to any alternate target in 20 seconds. With the correct missile type (radseeker or whatever) the missile could be locked onto the exact signature of a specific class of vehicle, a single species (or person!), or even the chemical composition of the other side's fatigues.

Firing a seeker missile is idiotproof: The gunner selects the range (taking a second) or just points the at the nearest viable target and pulls the trigger. The missile skims the ground at 300 yards per second and will hit automatically unless jammed or shot down, although the target gets his (or its) normal Dodge roll to avoid a direct hit. (This will do little good if a mininuke is being used!) If faced with active jamming (e.g., an ECM pack), roll a contest of skill between the missile brain's skill of 16 and the

jammer operator (or computer's) skill each turn. The missile cannot be jammed by any lower TL ECM, but higher TL jammers get a +2 to their roll per TL over 11. Any failure by the missile means it loses the target; it will either hunt for another target or crash. If the missile hits, damage is 6d×10 (10) for its explosive, shaped-charge warhead. Chemical warhead missiles do only 4d concussion damage, but cover an eight-hex radius with either blackout, prismatic, paralysis or nerve gas. Nuclear warheads may also be available (see mininukes, *GURPS Ultra-Tech*, p. 76). At TL14+, hell grenade warheads are available (*Ultra-Tech*, p. 108).

An SML magazine holds three missiles. One, two, or three can be launched in a turn, and programmed to home on the same or different targets. The fully loaded launcher weighs 15 pounds and costs \$4000. Extra missiles take three seconds to reload, weigh three pounds (10 pounds for a three-shot magazine) and cost \$2500 each (\$5000 for mininukes or hell grenades). Legality 0.

Sensor Web: This is a skintight jumpsuit controlled by a small, dedicated computer woven into the web's fabric and linked to the user through a neural interface. A sensor web extends the ranges of the user's normal senses (sight, smell, hearing, and touch) to a sensitivity greater than most animals. The computer interprets the sensations into data that a human brain can perceive. Vision can be extended into the infrared and ultraviolet—even to X-rays, radio, and gamma-rays—allowing detection of radiation like a radscanner. Hearing can be tuned to both subsonic and ultrasonic ranges or intensified to give up to a +5 bonus to Hearing rolls. Smell can be rendered acute enough that the character can track like a biohound, and touch becomes fine enough that the user can feel the air movements made by a person behind him and deduce his exact position or read ink with his fingertips.

The sensor web can also translate between sensory modalities, making it of considerable interest to artists. When so programmed, the belt computer can shift sensory perceptions. For instance, if light is perceived as a tactile sensation, the impact of different wavelengths of electromagnetic energy might be felt as a constantly varying breeze. Sound could be experienced as a sensation of shifting colors; with enough experience, the user might be able to interpret the different colors as different frequencies.

In order for it to function properly, no other clothing or armor may be worn over the sensor web. A force screen, being transparent to slow-moving objects and most harmless wavelengths of sound and light, does not interfere with the sensor web except to screen out electromagnetic radiation beyond the infrared to visual portion of the spectrum. A sensor web suit has PD 1 and DR 2. It uses a C cell for power, operating it for about a year. It can be built onto the surface of a suit of combat armor, a cybersuit, etc. for the same cost and weight, though it

must be installed in the armor when it is first purchased. \$6000, 4 pounds, Legality 6.

TECH LEVEL 12 EQUIPMENT

Rejuvenation: The rejuvenation process ("rejuve") is a parallel development of regeneration field technology in which the entire body's cells (including brain cells) are regenerated, making the subject physiologically younger. A rejuvenation requires a two-day stay under a rejuvenation field. During this time, the character is unconscious. Rejuve is relatively cheaper than repeated anagathic treatments or braintaping, but not always safer. Rejuvenation succeeds on a roll of HT+4 or less, with a -1 per additional treatment after the first on a certain body or any clones later made from its cells. It reduces the user's age by three years times the amount by which the HT roll was made. A failed rejuvenation roll means that rejuvenation has failed and may not be attempted ever again (doing so will automatically result in critical failure) on that person or any clones later made from his cells. A critical failure results in an increase in age of 6d years.

The only common side effect of rejuvenation is a chance for memory loss when brain cells are regenerated. Every time a rejuvenation succeeds, the character must roll against his IQ. On a failed roll, the character has suffered a minor memory loss and has forgotten some event from his past which he rarely thinks about, along with one of his least-used skills. Characters with Eidetic Memory get a +2 (+3 for second-level memory) to IQ. Rejuvenation will only work on someone whose current physiological age is over 50. Thus, if a 53 year old was rejuvenated down to age 39, he would have to wait 11 years before undergoing another rejuvenation. Cost of a rejuve treatment is \$40,000, but the cost is halved at each TL above 12. A rejuvenation field device is incredibly expensive and fills a whole room at TL12 or TL13—they are only found in major medical centers. At TL14+, the device is the size of an early automedic. \$100,000, 4 cubic yards, 600 pounds, Legality 5.

TECH LEVEL 13 EQUIPMENT

Gravitic Screwdriver: This Swiss toy is a short-ranged tractor/pressor beam guided by a ranging laser. Its controls can be worked with one hand, and it can slowly levitate objects (up to one-quarter of a pound in weight), turn a screw without touching it, suck the dust off a shard of Precursor pottery or remove a foreign object from a jammed mechanism. It is also excellent for picking TL7 or lower mechanical locks—or even pockets. It does not substitute for more specialized tools, but gives an additional +1 to any applicable skill added to other modifiers for having (or lacking) proper equipment. It has a range of one foot and works for six hours of continuous use on a single B cell. \$500, 1/2 pound, Legality 6.

TECH LEVEL 14 EQUIPMENT

Matrix Disruptors and Ghost Wands: These weapons cause a linear disruption in the matrix of local space-time—a very narrow beam,

GURPS

related to a gravitic superstring, that will pass through anything but has a relatively short range. A matrix disruptor does little damage, but totally ignores the PD and DR of all defenses, including force screens and deflectors, except stasis webs. It has no effect on targets protected by stasis webs. Matrix disruptor beams are invisible and silent. Because they fire a narrow beam and are totally recoilless, matrix disruptors use the laser autofire rules (see p. B119-121 and *Ultra-Tech*, p. 20). In other words, damage from all rounds striking the target is totaled before subtracting DR. Matrix disruptors use the Beam Weapons (Tachyonic) skill.

Ghost wands are short-range melee weapon versions of matrix disruptors which use similar principles. They are treated as normal melee weapons except that ST has no effect, and ghost wands ignore all defenses (both PD and DR) but stasis webs.

Matrix Disruptor Pistol: A large pistol. *Mal:* Crit. Type: Imp. Damage: 1d-1 SS: 8 ACC: 10 1/2D: — Max: 500 Wt: 3 RoF: 8 Shots: 24/ C ST: — Rcl: 0 Cost: \$2000 LC: 3.

Matrix Disruptor Carbine: A short rifle. *Mal:* Crit. Type: Imp. Damage: 1d SS: 12 ACC: 16 1/2D: — Max: 2000 Wt: 8 RoF: 8 Shots: 80/ D ST: — Rcl: 0 Cost: \$6000 LC: 0.

Heavy Matrix Disruptor: A tripod-mounted weapon. *Mal:* Crit. Type: Imp. Damage: 1d SS: 14 ACC: 16 1/2D: — Max: 4000 Wt: 40 RoF: 16 Shots: 800/E ST: — Rcl: 0 Cost: \$20,000 LC: 0.

Ghostwand: A powered hilt similar in appearance to a regular sword hilt. When activated, a short (1.5-yard) matrix disruption beam extends from the hilt for use as a sword. Use Force Sword skill (familiarity is at -2). A single C cell powers it for 20 seconds of continuous use. Activating it takes one second. Type: Cut/Imp. Amt: 2d-1 cut, 1d+2 imp. Reach: C, 1, 2 Wt: 2 Cost: \$3000 ST: — LC: 3 TL: 14.

TECH LEVEL 15 EQUIPMENT

Portable Transmuter: At TL15, energy can be turned directly into matter. Essentially, a molecular pattern is fed into the machine along with energy (lots of energy!), and the desired product materializes. A portable transmuter can create a duplicate of any TL14 or lower device that weighs less than 22 pounds or any new device whose complete technical blueprints are programmed into the machine. In order to create something, a minidisk containing that device's complete blueprints down to the atomic level (produced using an ultrascaner, see *GURPS Ultra-Tech*, p. 99-100) must be inserted into the transmuter. If blueprints are not available, the transmuter has a built-in ultrascaner. The energy cost is enormous, but the transmuter's built-in total conversion power pack can easily handle the drain. Even so, it

takes the transmuter one minute \times the square of the intended device's weight in pounds to produce something. A portable transmuter weighs one ton and costs \$10 million at TL15, (220 pounds and \$1 million at TL16). Its integral mass converter requires that occasional garbage be thrown into it every few months to keep it running.

Tau-Shield: This is a silvery, skintight space suit similar to a cybersuit (*Ultra-Tech*, p. 93 and *Space*, p. 63). It functions exactly as a cybersuit, with all cybersuit abilities (but with PD 6, DR 250, thermal superconducting armor, and a radiation PF of 20). However, it also incorporates temporal disruption circuitry similar to that of a tau-field generator, but of a more precise order. Its tau-field has two settings: tactical and infinity. It takes one action to change settings. On "tactical" setting, the tau-shield slows external time by a factor of 2 to 1, enabling the wearer to move faster, dodge attacks, and strike harder. While the suit is on tactical setting, the user gets two actions per turn, and the advantage of Combat Reflexes (or double normal bonuses if he already has Combat Reflexes). While the suit is in this setting, its wearer seems to shimmer, as if he were covered in liquid crystal. On "infinity" setting, the tau-shield functions exactly like a stasis belt (see sidebar in *Ultra-Tech*, p. 114), freezing the user in space-time and making him an invulnerable silver statue for a preset duration of anywhere between five minutes and a billion years. While on infinity setting, the user is totally invulnerable (except to a tachyonic disruptor) but cannot do anything until the suit's timer runs out, since he is frozen in time. A tau-shield costs \$250,000, weighs 80 pounds (but its weight does not count for encumbrance purposes—see the cybersuit description). Its E cell powers it for 24 hours of constant use. In TL16 armies, the tau-shield (in conjunction with a force screen) is the standard form of personal armor. Legality 0.

ERRATA

P. 1: Add David Dunham as a contributor, and Stephanie Wardwell's playtest group (Stephanie Wardwell, John Monahan, Steven Piziks, Allen Shock, Mary Zawcki) for playtesting. Troy Leaman designed the sensor web included in this article.

P. 13: The \$1000 word processing program is a complete desktop publishing program, not just a word processor.

P. 22: The military laser carbine (Weapon Statistics Table, p. 126) description is missing. After the military laser rifle description, add, "A military laser carbine is a shortened 'assault' version of the military laser rifle."

P. 23: Under Hotshotting, add: "The 1/2D and Max range of any type of weapon are doubled when firing hotshots."

P. 23: Loaded needler magazines (including gas cartridges) weigh three-quarters of a pound and cost \$38 (needler) or 1 pound and \$48 (needle rifle).

P. 24: Loaded tangler magazines weigh five pounds and cost \$50 (tangler) or two pounds and \$20 (tangler pistol).

P. 30: Ablative foam DR is too low; increase its DR against lasers from DR 4 to DR 10.

P. 32: Under Sleep Teacher, the time required to gain a new mental disadvantage should be divided by 10. It is 40 hours per point, not 400. A five-point Sense of Duty takes 200 hours, not 2000.

P.38: Under Vacc Suits, delete the sentence: "Remember that like other gadgets, the weight and cost of all suits have one TL later (at TL9) and again at TL10." As the Improvements at Higher TLs sidebar on p. 5 states, vacc suits and other survival suits, like armor, are not reduced in weight at higher TLs.

P.40: Under Exoskeletons, add, "Unlike vacc suits, the weight of an exosuit is reduced at later TLs. In a TL9+ version of an EVAC or EVAS, the weight of the vacc suit is not reduced, but the weight of the added exoskeleton is."

P. 52: Under Flamers, the roll to unseal armor should be -1 for every 10 DR the target location has, not -1 for every 5 DR. The next paragraph should refer to -1/10 DR, not -1/5 DR.

P. 77: Under Armor Without Faceplates, only a critical hit to the head will burn out the helmet's TV scanner.

P. 86: Under Intruder Suit, the suit should subtract -5 from attack rolls against the wearer, as well as vision rolls. Armor can have both chameleon and intruder systems, but modifiers to vision and attack rolls are not cumulative.

P. 90: Electron pistols and rifles on "blast" setting can fire hotshots just like blasters. A hotshot does $\times 1.5$ damage but uses up four charges.

P.103: Under Pulsars, the description stating that force screens protect fully against pulsars is incorrect; as p. 105 says, force screens protect with half DR against pulsar fire.

P. 105: Force screen descriptions are:
Personal Force Screen: A belt-mounted force screen with DR 50, plus 50 per TL over 13. One C cell powers it for 15 minutes of continuous use. \$5000, 2 pounds, Legality Class 2.

Backpack Force Screen: This more powerful force screen has DR 100, +100 per TL over 13. It uses a D cell, which lasts for one hour. \$25,000, 25 pounds, Legality Class 1.

Heavy Force Screen: Used to defend campsites or vehicles, this device generates a powerful force screen with a five-yard radius. It has DR 300 (+300 per TL over 13). An E cell powers it for 2 hours. \$100,000, 75 pounds, .01 cubic yards, Legality Class 0.

P. 111: Under Tachyonic Disruptors, delete the line: "No armor worn under the screen protects!" Armor actually does protect at 1/10 DR, as shown on the Weapon Tables on p. 127.

P. 121: Under Police and Security Equipment, the listing for neuronics handcuffs (described on p. 80) is missing. It is: *Weight:* 1/4 Cost: \$200* TL: 10 LC: 2 Page: 80.

P. 124: The second and third headings on the Implants Table continued from p. 123 should read "Cost" and "Operation Cost," not "Weight" and "Cost."

P. 124: Armor and Force Screens Table. All

values are for full suits. All DRs are for torso armor and may vary by hit location or against different weapon types (see the individual descriptions of each armor or screen). The prices and weights given for monocrys are wrong. Since these are full suits, prices should be \$1000, \$1500, and \$2000, and weights should be seven, 12, and 16 pounds.

P. 126: Military dinosaur graser's weight is 10 pounds, not four pounds.

P. 126: M-LAWS weight is 35 pounds, not 13 pounds—the description on p. 55 is correct, not the Weapon Tables.

P. 126: Splatgun damage is 5d (10) as the text on p. 55 states, not 4d (10) as given on the table on p. 126.

OPTIONAL RULES

Improvements at Higher TLs: Weapons should increase in range as well as doing more damage. Every TL after it first appears, an energy weapon increases its Max and 1/2D range by 20% of its original range (e.g., a TL8 laser pistol with a Max range of 500 would have a Max range of 600 at TL9, 700 at TL10, etc.).

Data Penetration: A "cyberpunk" run at the REDCON convention in Kingston showed that it was too easy to hack into secure computers unless they have several megacredits worth of defenses. To fix this, whenever someone tries to hack into a secure database (p. 14) either use the *GURPS Cyberpunk* rules, or have the hacker roll against his Computer Programming skill at -4 rather than just against Computer Programming. All normal modifiers for defenses, worm programs, etc. still apply.

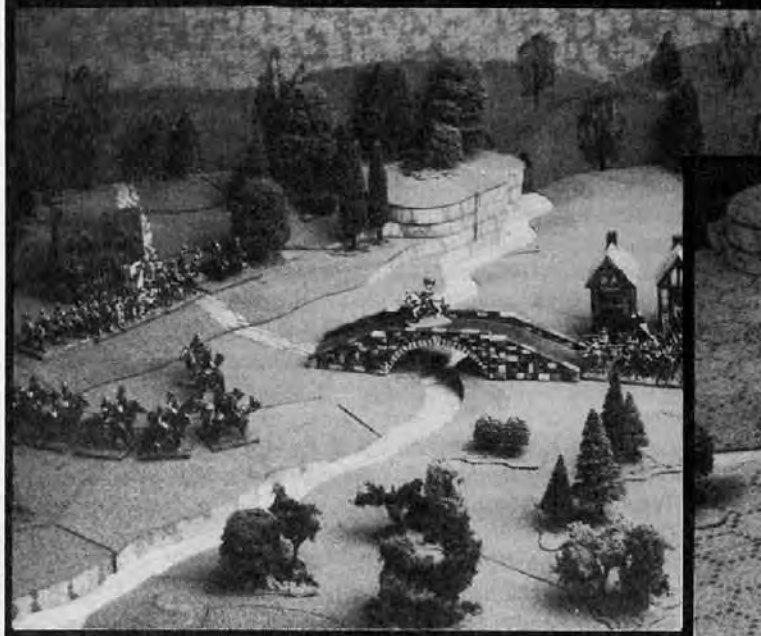
Laser Scopes: Any firer using both a laser scope and a HUD sight, holographic HUD sight, or neural interface may add one-half the weapon's Accuracy bonus to his hit chance even if he is not aiming. This should make HUDs more realistic and make single-shot weapons more effective.

Futuristic Melee Weapons: It's an unfortunate fact that most of the ultra-technology blade weapons are useless against TL9+ combat armor. GMs who desire more swordplay (in the space opera tradition) should have armor protected with only 1/10 DR (rather than 1/2 DR) against monomolecular blades (and other monowire gadgets). This is not unrealistic—a blade a single molecule wide should go through armorplating like butter! To retain game balance with other blade weapons, have armor protect against sonic blades and force swords with 1/5 DR, and against vibroblades with 1/2 DR.

Fusion Guns: Damage for fusion guns is somewhat low compared to other weapons. Try increasing fusion pistol damage to 16d, and fusion rifle damage to 5d \times 10.

Gamma-Ray Lasers: Unless they only appear in the campaign as unique Precursor artifacts, autofiring grasers are too effective for play balance even against targets using both force screens and thermal superconducting armor. Either gamma-ray lasers should divide armor and screen DR by (3) rather than (5), or GMs should increase the effectiveness of force screens against them. Ω

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The Rebel Air Force: Combat Airspeeders

Whitney Weston



WALKER BUSTER HEAVY ASSAULT AIRSPEEDER

Upon reviewing the battle after the evacuation of Hoth, the Rebel High Command found that, although the Rebel forces were able to elude Lord Vader's squadron, the margin of safety was too narrow for anyone's comfort. Especially disconcerting was the battle on Hoth's surface. Despite the courage and ingenuity displayed by the Rebel speeder pilots under Luke Skywalker, the Imperial AT-AT force was able to penetrate the power generator's defenses and destroy it. Something more was needed if the Alliance's land forces were to prevail against the Empire's hordes of walkers and legions of stormtroopers.

One answer came in the form of the Slayn & Korpil AHS-1 heavy assault airspeeder, which gained the nickname "Walker Buster" during field trials. The prototype was pieced together from a damaged B-wing starfighter, and subsequent models have followed its design. The AHS-1's B-wing command pod has the two short B-wing airfoils joined to it and canted downward at a slight angle, forming the main airfoil. Repulsorlift engines with ion afterburners are mounted underneath the command pod at the rear, and a stabilizer airfoil is mounted above and aft of the command pod and then joined to the vehicle by two vertical stabilizers mounted on the main airfoils.

For armament, the Walker Buster carries two Taim & Bak KL5 laser cannons, one at the tip of each main airfoil (the same housings also hold the main landing gear), and an Arakyd proton torpedo launcher, which is mounted in the rear of the command pod and fires through a tube running the length of the pod to its "chin." A Thunderbolt 595 quad blaster cannon is mounted in the nose, providing low-level firepower for less durable targets.

But the Walker Buster's main attack is carried in its four GX-15 "Starbolt" concussion missiles. The Starbolt is equipped with an armor-piercing warhead, among the Rebels' newest innovations in military weapons technology. The warhead is a pseudointelligent guidance system capable of identifying and locking onto a target by verbal commands alone. It directs a concussive energy charge strong enough to blast a hole in a garrison wall or cripple an Imperial walker, if not destroy it outright (with a well placed shot).

While its weapons make it a formidable enough fighting machine, the Walker Buster has one serious drawback in its size and weight. It depends on its airfoils as much as its repulsor engines for lift and

stability, and it requires a brief takeoff run to generate enough lift to gain altitude. An additional drawback lies in the AHS-1's lack of maneuverability. While its ion afterburners give it enough speed to outperform the AT-AT and AT-ST walkers, this lack of maneuverability leaves it vulnerable to TIE fighter attack or concentrated laser fire. Despite this, the Walker Buster is expected to play a large part in the war against the Empire and should soon be deployed among Rebel forces.

WALKER BUSTER AIRSPEEDER

Craft: Slayn & Korpil AHS-1 (Walker Buster) airspeeder

Type: Heavy assault airspeeder

Crew: 1

Flight Ceiling: 125 kilometers

Passengers: None

Cargo Capacity: 10 kilograms

Scale: Starfighter (due to power output)

Speed: [3D+1]

Maneuverability: [0]

Body Strength: [4D]

Weapons:

Two KL5 Laser Cannons (fire linked)

Fire Control: [3D]

Damage: [6D]

Quad Blaster Cannon

Fire Control: [3D]

Damage: [3D+2]

Proton Torpedo Launcher

Fire Control: [3D]

Damage: [9D]

Starbolt Concussion Missiles

Fire Control: [6D]

Damage: [12D]

TACHYON FAST-ATTACK AIRSPEEDER

The Tachyon is a fast combat airspeeder designed to intercept, engage and destroy enemy spacecraft entering a planet's atmosphere. It can do everything a starfighter can do, except travel in space. The need for a combat repulsorcraft so dedicated became apparent upon the Empire's increased production and deployment of space fighter craft (especially the TIE bomber).

Faced with a specific, deadly threat to its ground installations and not enough starfighters to protect them (and the populations of sympathetic planets), the Rebel Alliance found itself with a gaping hole in its defense scheme. The Tachyon is an attempt to fill that void.

To build a Tachyon, Rebel engineers start with an Incom T-47 airspeeder and modify it extensively, practically rebuilding it from the ground up. Every kilogram of excess weight and every centimeter of wasted space are pared from the vehicle, then a larger, higher-output power plant is installed. The engines are specially retuned, and the power couplings are augmented to provide the maximum degree of lift and thrust (requiring double the maintenance of the standard combat airspeeder to keep operational). As

the body is being rebuilt, the crew compartment and other vital points are reinforced with light armor and stress-dissipating material, and micro-sized repulsor thrusters are installed for extra maneuverability. Finally, twin laser cannons are fixed in position on either side of the cockpit, so the pilot must aim the entire ship to target the weapons.

The cockpit has barely enough room for the pilot. Speed and maneuverability are controlled by handgrips set in each armrest; a pedal under the left foot fires the laser cannons. The handgrips also control the repulsorlift motor in the ejection seat, which—although not as sophisticated as a starfighter ejection system—does provide a greater measure of pilot survivability than the average combat airspeeder.

So far, the Tachyon has met with great success in engagements against both TIE fighters and TIE bombers. The major problem with widespread deployment of the Tachyon has been finding pilots to fly it; it is reasoned that beings capable of handling such a high-performance machine would be better utilized flying starfighters and other combat spacecraft. But as the Rebellion spreads through the galaxy and the Rebel armed forces find their resources increased in number and scope, the Tachyon will find its place.

TACHYON AIRSPEEDER

Craft: Tachyon fast-attack airspeeder
Crew: 1
Flight Ceiling: 500 kilometers
Passengers: None
Cargo Capacity: 5 kilograms
Scale: Starfighter (due to power output)
Speed Code: [6D]
Maneuverability: [4D]

Body Strength:

[2D]

Weapons:

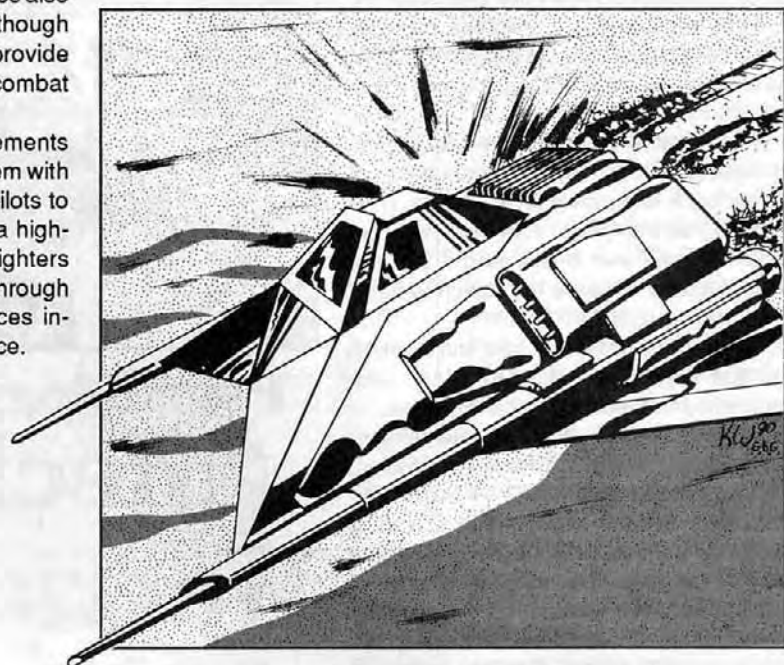
Twin Laser Cannons (fire linked)

Fire Control:

[1D+2]

Damage: [5D] Ω

STAR WARS



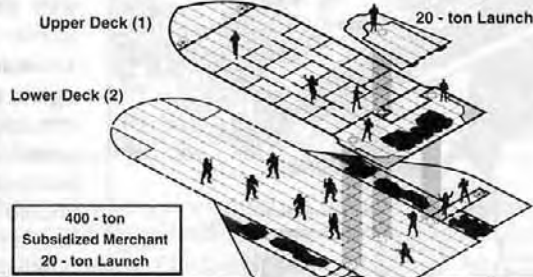
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If you read the last paragraph carefully you'll realize that I've used a sneaky trick. At the start the 'Mech was "it"; by the end, it was "you."

Now imagine that you're a 'Mech pilot, controlling a robot by a combination of biofeedback and movement sensors. How long will it take for you to start thinking of the 'Mech as your own body? And if you do, what happens to you if the 'Mech is damaged or destroyed?

This may seem far-fetched, but remember that nearly everything a 'Mech pilot experiences comes from the machine. In many ways 'Mech cockpits are like sensory deprivation tanks. The pilot is strapped in, and sees through the machine's "eyes" and sensors. The arms and legs are slaved to movements of the pilot—it's the easiest way to avoid control problems. 'Mechs do have some cockpit instruments, but usually they report routine status information which the pilot can safely ignore. Damage control is important when the 'Mech is in combat, but that's usually a tiny fraction of a mission. Most of the time a pilot is concentrating on movement and sensor data, to get early warning of any trouble, and ignoring the internal workings of the machine. Given a little time, it's inevitable that the pilot will identify with the machine. An automobile driver sometimes identifies with his car in this manner (such as when someone scratches "his" fender), and the connections between pilot and 'Mech are a lot more intimate.

An apocryphal story (which I haven't been able to verify) may show why too much identification with one's machine is a problem. It's rumored that the USAF experimented with remotely piloted reconnaissance aircraft during the Vietnam war, but had to scrap the idea. After hours of concentration on controls and camera views, the pilots were getting battle fatigue, although they never left the safety of their air-conditioned bunkers. They were so closely involved in flying the aircraft that they forgot that they weren't aboard! In the case of a 'Mech, real danger lurks in your surrounding environment, and there's much more of a temptation to identify with the machine you're controlling.

Psychologists sometimes compare weapons to body parts. How would it feel if someone literally blew your arm off, and took away your most potent weapon? Some



Psychology of 'Mech Warriors

Marcus L. Rowland

BATTLETECH



mental damage is likely, with psychosomatic injury the most probable outcome. After a routine fight, 'Mech pilots complain of strains and wrenched muscles, at least partially subconscious responses to the damage taken by their 'Mechs. If a 'Mech was destroyed or badly mauled, the psychosomatic damage may be much more severe.

If all this is true, losing a 'Mech's arm or leg might be nearly as psychologically damaging as a real amputation. Total destruction of the 'Mech could be completely traumatic. Combat fatigue is one possible result. Other results might include psychosomatic paralysis, disorientation, or catatonic coma.

I'm not suggesting that these injuries should be an inevitable result of 'Mech damage—usually pilots will have the mental strength to overcome the problems. But real difficulties might arise if characters have other worries, such as real injuries or a succession of defeats, and fall prey to their fears at a moment of crisis. The exact methods used to simulate these effects are obviously dependent on the game system used.

For example, in *Mechwarrior* an "identification psychosis" might be an inborn ability (for want of a better word), defined as follows:

Identification Psychosis (-15 cp): The character tends to think of the 'Mech as his own body. If the 'Mech is damaged, the character must make a Charisma saving roll. If the roll fails, the character takes temporary or permanent psychosomatic damage. The referee should apply modifiers if the damage is unusually severe or the 'Mech is destroyed.

There is no need for players to know exactly what modifiers you're using, or how severe the effects are likely to be. I'd also stipulate that any pilot is potentially vulnerable to this problem, even if the ability hasn't been taken; normal pilots just get much better saving rolls. Let characters meet NPCs with serious permanent problems—the former pilot who now spends his time sweeping the barracks floor over and over again, the basket case whose Locust was torn apart by a Crusader, and so forth. The severity of mental damage should be proportional to the damage to the 'Mech, and should start to mend if the pilot sees the 'Mech repaired.

While the examples in this article are drawn from *Battletech* and *Mechwarrior*, there is no reason why these ideas couldn't be applied to any game based on the "robot exoskeleton" concept; there are simply too many games to give examples for every system. Give your players something extra to worry about, they'll thank you for it in the end! Ω

An Eye for an Eye

A Warhammer 40,000 Rogue Trader Scenario

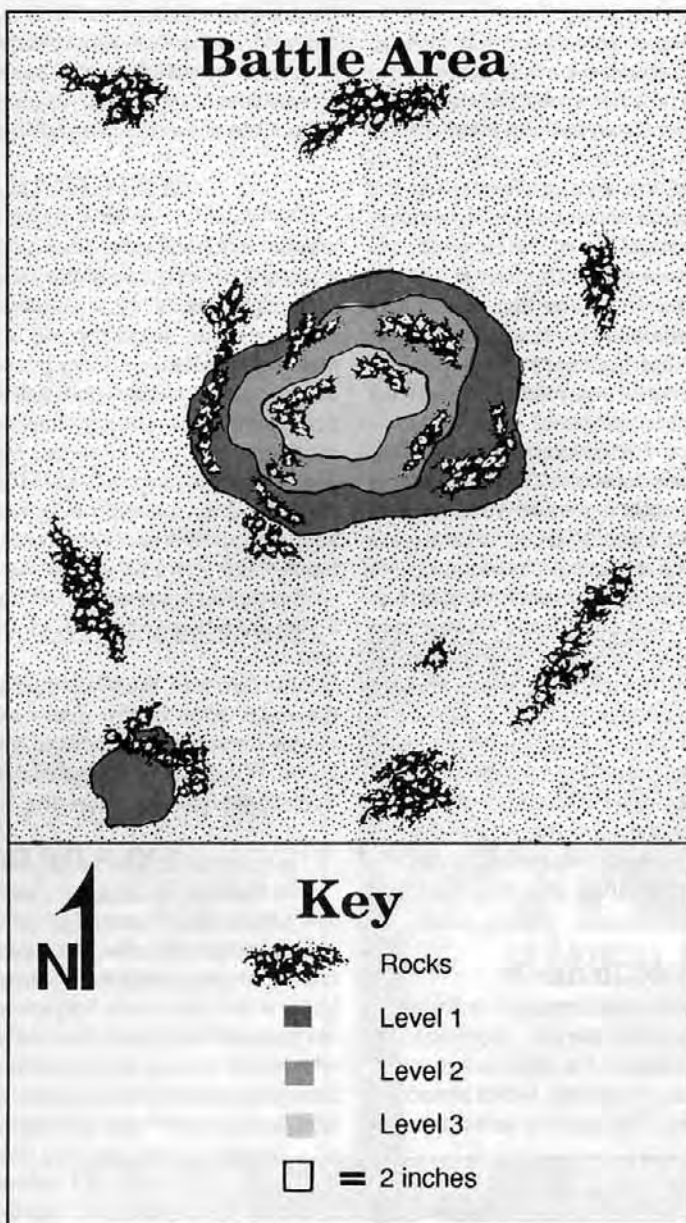
Craig Sheeley

An Eye For An Eye is a scenario of the fiercest combat, a clash between fratricidal brethren of the *Adeptes Astartes*. There can be no retreat or surrender—only death can satisfy honor and appease the hatred which grips both sides.

All students of Imperial history know of the madness which gripped the Imperium in centuries past, a warp-inspired madness spreading from one man to engulf and nearly destroy the entire Imperium. The man who started it all was the emperor's trusted warmaster, Horus. His rebellion became known as the Horus Heresy.

The threat to the Imperium came from the warmaster's ability to inspire loyalty and command the legionnaires—many legions chose to side with the warmaster when he declared his war on the emperor. Seemingly unshakable legions like the Emperor's Children and the World Eaters joined Horus and his forces. Imperial guard armies and other units joined suit, while loyalist units fought a frantic rear guard action against the warmaster's assault on the emperor. Only combat between the warmaster and the emperor himself, fought in the Imperial palace on Earth, decided the fate of the rebellion. Horus lost.

Of all the hosts of the *Adeptes Astartes*, the case of the Emperor's Eyes Legion is unique. When news of the warmaster's "crusade" reached the legion homeworld of Ocula, reaction was mixed. The legion's leader, Brother-Commander Phesarius, had served under Horus in several campaigns and believed the general's lies that the emperor was too weak to command against the horrors of Chaos that strove to destroy the Imperium. Since the Emperor's Eyes were created to keep watch on the warp-plagued area of space known as the Eye of Terror, Phesarius well knew of the perils of Chaos. So he declared for the warmaster. Unfortunately for his plans, the chapter's warships were away repelling an Ork incursion past the Eye of Terror, and the chapter could not embark to join



Horus. Phesarius assured his troops that when the chapter's barges returned, they would go to war.

Chief Librarian Arkan mistrusted the Brother-Commander's instincts and resolved to keep close watch on the situation. He sensed something about the warmaster's emissaries that disturbed him. During the wait for the fleet, his suspicions were confirmed: Horus' emissaries inducted Phesarius into their cult. Exposed to the seductions of Chaos, Phesarius succumbed. Arkan gathered his librarians about him and made a lightning strike to depose the commander before he could taint the legion, but a clique of power-seeking junior librarians betrayed them before Arkan's force could attack.

Combat broke out within the walls of the legion's fortress as the legionnaires declared for Phesarius or for Arkan. The librarian forces gained rapid advantage at first with psychic powers, but Phesarius, aided by Horus' emissaries, summoned warp powers to counter-attack. Faced by such an assault, Arkan and his followers were driven back to the library, where only constant vigil by the librarians kept the Chaos creatures from overwhelming them.

The stalemate was broken by the return of the chapter ships. They had succeeded in repel-

ling the Orks and had captured an Ork spaceship/hulk. On the way back, they received news of Horus' declaration of his new "Empire of Chaos." Alarmed, the marines sped back to their homeworld to warn the rest of the chapter. When they arrived, Commander Phesarius confirmed their fears by telling them that Horus' "rot" had spread to the chapter psykers. The fleet commander, Lieutenant-Commander Chronos, was preparing to bombard the library from orbit when Arkan reached him telepathically and related what had happened. Chronos switched his plans and targeted Phesarius' forces, landing troops to destroy the renegade commander.

Evercanny, Phesarius chose retreat, teleporting his minions to the Ork

hulk and setting off to join Horus, crippling the chapter ships so they could not follow. He did not reach the warmaster—Horus was defeated, and the renegade marines joined the fleets that were driven into the Eye of Terror. The remnants of the chapter rearmed and resumed the vigil, watching the Eye of Terror with more vigilance than ever.

THE EMPEROR'S EYES

The loyalist marines retained the chapter name but changed their insignia. No longer did they bear the old chapter insignia, an infinity symbol drawn as a pair of eyes. Instead, they adopted a single white circle split by a red slit-pupil, and called themselves the "Watchful Eye" or "Ever-Vigilant Eye." Their symbol is usually called the "Lidless Eye."

The Watchful Eyes kept their chapter colors: red with orange shoulder pads and shin pads. Their organization is in accordance with the dictates of the Index Astartes (in other words, they follow the standard marine army lists from *White Dwarf* and the *Warhammer 40,000 Compendium*).

The Chaos Marines who fled to the Eye of Terror are still commanded by Phesarius. The ex-commander harbors an abiding hatred for the legionnaires who "betrayed" him and often sends his Chaos-mutated marines forth to plague and harry his former legion's patrols. Upon entering the Eye of Terror, Phesarius decreed that his marines were the Emperor's Eyes rather than those who had driven the traitors into exile. He ordered that his chapter's symbol be changed to the Eye of Horus in honor of the warmaster—all his marines bear it on their helmets or shoulder pads.

Phesarius' forces became known as the "Eyes of Doom," as their arrival signaled destruction on a massive scale. The commander brought with him most of the old chapter's assault weapons and organized his forces accordingly. All Eyes of Doom squads are Devastator Squads, with four heavy weapons per squad. Like typical Chaos Marines, they are marred by mutations (officers, chaplains, and the chief librarian receive one Chaos Reward and D4-2 Chaos Attributes).

The Eyes of Doom also retained the chapter colors, though usually in a grotesque parody of the original shades. Followers of Khorne kept their armor red, but the shoulder pads and shin pads acquired a brassy color of orange. Slaaneshi Marines shaded their armor pink and added yellow to the orange pads, edging them with pale green (over the centuries, the chapter varied between alliances with the more warlike of the Chaos powers). Medics colored their armor in shades of green, signifying alliance with no power and making them easily identifiable.

SCENARIO BACKGROUND

While on patrol around the warpstorm that shrouds the planets in the Eye of Terror, the Watchful Eyes' patrol barque, *Vigilance*, detected signals coming from an asteroid in the Almedan system. Cruising in close, the barque dispatched a shuttle with a platoon of Watchful Eyes Marines to investigate. The marines landed on the

dusty surface of the body and spread out to reconnoiter. The platoon split in half into two-squad sections and went in opposite directions, leaving an assault guard on the shuttle.

One section discovered a grounded spaceship—a ship bearing the Eye of Horus—and stormed the craft. No guards were found—only a cargo bay full of cryoentombed people (recruits and slaves for the Eyes of Doom, according to the ship's log). The marines disabled the ship and destroyed the living cargo, then withdrew to rendezvous with the shuttle and return to the *Vigilance*, there to destroy the Chaos vessel from space.

However, before the marines could reach the shuttle, the Chaos ship's crew sighted them and gave chase. Outgunned, the Watchful Eyes section took cover in the rocks of the airless planetoid and called for assistance. Unfortunately, help was far away, and the Eyes of Terror had their heavy weapons and one weapon far worse—a marine who had given up his body to one of the minor powers of the warp. One of the Possessed!

WATCHFUL EYE SETUP

The Watchful Eye Marines are set up on and around the rocky hill, within the dotted circle. They have two squads of marines, a medic, a Level 2 psyker (one of the chapter's codifiers) and a chaplain.

Equipment: All marines have on a suit of powered armor with communicator, respirator and autosenses. They each also have a knife, a bolt pistol, and frag grenades. The chaplain has a bolt gun and conversion field. The medic has a bolt gun, chainsword, medipack, jump pack, energy scanner and bioscanner. The psyker has a bolt gun and a power sword. One marine per squad has a missile launcher (with targeter and suspensors), firing melta, frag and smoke shells. One marine per squad has a flamer (with targeter and suspensor). All other marines have a bolt gun (eight per squad, plus the mentioned heavy weapons).

The psyker's powers are 6D6 psi points, 2D6 abilities (maximum 8; discard powers above 8) randomly generated between Levels 1 and 2.

After turn four, the Watchful Eyes receive an additional squad at the north edge of the map—reinforcements. After Turn 10, the shuttle enters the battle (Max 500", Acc 200", TRR 2, Cap 50, T 9, D 100, W 8, E 10). It carries four las-cannons in two twin-gun turrets. Each turret has a targeter and starts strafing the Chaos Marines.

EYES OF DOOM SETUP

The Eyes of Doom enter from any desired map edge or edges. They have two squads of Chaos Marines, led by the possessee.

Equipment: All marines have on a suit of powered armor with communicator, respirator and autosenses. They each also have a knife, a bolt pistol and frag grenades. Each squad consists of six marines with bolt guns, one marine with a multi-melta, two marines with heavy bolters, and one marine with a heavy plasma gun. All heavy weapons have targeters and appropriate suspensors. The possessee has no extra weapons or equipment.

The possessee has both psychic powers and unusual powers native to the warp entity that inhabits the body. It has 3D6 psi points and 1D6 Level 1 abilities. Its arms have mutated into huge tentacles; its eyes have merged into one orb; and its body is twisted and grotesque, with its armor mutating to match the contours beneath it. Any Watchful Eye Marine coming within four inches of the possessee must make an Int test to avoid its gaze. Those failing the test have the power of the warp turned against them, suffering a -1 to all die rolls for the rest of the game. In addition, the

WATCHFUL EYES

Marines	MS	WS	BS	S	T	W	I	A	Ld	Int	Cl	WI
Regular	4	4	4	4	3	1	4	1	8	8	8	8
Medic	4	5	5	4	3	1	5	1	8	8	8	8
Psyker	4	5	5	4	3	1	5	1	8	8	8	8
Chaplain	4	6	6	4	4	2	6	2	9	9	9	9

EYES OF DOOM

Marines	MS	WS	BS	S	T	W	I	A	Ld	Int	Cl	WI
Regular	4	4	4	4	3	1	4	1	8	8	8	8
Possessee	4	7	1	7	4	3	4	3	8	9	10	9

possessee gains a +1 save against all attacks except psychic attacks. The possessee's Strength hits in hand-to-hand combat with a -1 saving modifier.

If the possessee is reduced to 0 wounds (or below), do not remove the figure. The possessee goes into a regenerative trance. At the end of each Eyes of Doom turn the possessee may recover one wound if he succeeds at a Wp roll. The possessee may not do anything else while regenerating, not even recover psi points. If the possessee is reduced to 0 or fewer wounds as a result of psychic attack, it cannot regenerate.

VICTORY CONDITIONS

The side that destroys the other wins. If the Eye of Doom Marines destroy the Watchful Eyes Marines before the shuttle arrives or destroy the shuttle as well as the Watchful Eye forces, they win a major victory. If the Watchful Eye Marines destroy the Eye of Doom forces before any of their reinforcements arrive, they win a major victory.

SPECIAL RULES

Besides the rules pertaining to the possessee, the environment of the battle adds one consideration: Any smoke or gas clouds do not drift. They do, however, disperse on a 1D6 roll of 1 at the beginning of each turn.

Whenever the Emperor's Eyes meet, their ancient rivalry moves them to ferocious foolishness. Both chapters are subject to hatred when facing one another.

OPTIONAL RULES

Overwatch Fire: "Warhammer by the Numbers" in Challenge 44 lists an optional rule for fire during the enemy's movement phase. Since then, a question was raised concerning following-fire weapons. The problem lay with an interpretation of the basic following-fire

rule. The firer shot target A and killed it, then moved his fire four inches to target B, then to target C, and so on, just like regular following-fire.

But overwatch following-fire does not work in this manner. Overwatch following-fire allows following-fire weapons to fire upon any and all models moving one inch or more (two inches or more at long range) within the firer's 90° front arc. If a wound is achieved on a target, the following-fire weapon may continue to fire at the same target until the target is dead or the firer fails to wound the target.

Really Powered Armor: Strangely, the powered armor in *Warhammer 40,000 Rogue Trader* adds nothing to the Strength of the wearer—not even Terminator armor. As an option, Strength can be added to the armor, replacing the wearer's Strength. Each point of Strength costs two points, and the maximum armor Strength is 6 (7 for Terminator armor and Squad Exo-Armor). Each point of armor Strength also counts as a suspensor for carrying equipment. For instance, a marine set of powered armor with Strength 4 would cost eight points and negate two inches of heavy equipment movement penalty (the same cost and effect as four suspensors). Strength 5 would cost 10 points and negate 2.5 inches of movement penalty.

Strength Counts: In hand-to-hand combat, stronger opponents should be able to cut through armor more easily—currently, a marine in powered armor has a 4-6 save against a Strength 2 Gretchin or a Strength 6 Genestealer. In order to represent the hitting power of stronger opponents, apply a -1 save modifier in hand-to-hand combat per point of Strength over 4. For example, that Strength 6 Genestealer now hits with the benefit of a -2 penalty to its armored target on its hits. □



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Centurion Tactics Tips

Tips on tabletop tactics and on force selection for 150-point units.

Rich Ostorero

Tactical treatises for wargames tend to fall into two categories. One is the "principles of war" article where every military maxim from ancient times is recycled for the new generation of tactical games and gamers. The second digests the old military maxims and applies them to a specific game. With the goal of providing *Centurion* players with directly applicable suggestions, herein are tips on tabletop tactics and on force selection for 150-point units.

TABLETOP TACTICS TIPS

Move onto the Map at High Speed: Rapid movement allows friendly units to reach favorable terrain ahead of the enemy if the enemy is moving slowly. Moving slowly yields the best terrain to the enemy. Don't let the opposition pick the ground—take it by moving fast.

Deploy Infantry as Soon as Possible from TTF: Squads riding inside or atop vehicles are useless. They can't paint or fire, yet they're vulnerable to shots that pierce an APC's tinfoil armor or hit the tank rider's vehicle. Pop up to TT, and drop squads on the fly. This risks bottom hits on vehicles that can ill afford them, but the tactic deploys the PBLs to do their job.

Declare Nonmoving Units First, Then Nonengaged Units, and Engaged Units Last: In a sequential movement game, the most desirable place in the sequence is last, as it allows reaction to the enemy's movement without a response. Declaring the nonmovers first threatens the enemy's moving vehicles with opportunity fire and allows more closely engaged friendlies to move later. Next, move any nonengaged units to battle range. This spares the most critical moves for last. If the friendly side has the initiative, press the attack; if not, run and assume a defensive posture.

Keep All Units Moving: A unit that stands still for long becomes an inviting target for *Centurion*'s artillery units. A move of two hexes a turn will discourage most artillery attacks and defeat all but mines and the most lucky Hell or HAFE shots.

Kill Infantry with Light Mortars: Light mortars are best for eliminating infantry because they can fire unanswerable direct-fire shots at infantry within 20 hexes, hit most of the time, always kill at least one infantryman if the target isn't in cover, are almost as deadly as HAFE, and cost a point per tube. While AP lasers and artillery are deadly against PBL, they are a cost-inefficient means of killing infantry. HAFE and Hell rounds will devastate infantry, but they seldom hit. Furthermore, the ability to fire these devastating rounds costs as much as a platoon of light grav tanks. Vehicular weapons are better used on hard armor or require closure to easy laser-paint range to use AP lasers.

Scrape Rows, then Pierce Columns: *Centurion* weapons come in two flavors. Scrapers—SMLMs, HAFE, HELL, MDCs, APDS—remove layers (rows) of armor. Piercers—lasers, HEAP, GLAD, mines, Hammerheads, TVLGs—punch deep into the armor columns like a stiletto. If the piercers are fired before the scrapers, scraper hits must always "stack" (hit the same column) with piercer hits to "widen" (remove by undercutting) any armor from the target. Further, this tactic wastes some damage because the scraper will scrape from layers already pierced.

Visualize this situation by imagining the slicing of Swiss cheese with a wire cheese knife. The wire slices cheese (armor) and cheese holes (piercing hit areas) equally. The "damage" done to the hole regions is wasted. If the scrapers are fired prior to the piercers, no damage is wasted punching through already-damaged armor. In addition, the scrapers thin the target's armor, making internal damage from follow-on piercer hits much more likely.

This situation implies an optimum firing order for *Centurion*'s direct-fire weapons: SMLM, MDC, APDS, TVLG, Hammerhead, HEAP, and lasers. SMLMs scrape the broadest armor swath—nine columns maximum—with a single hit. MDCs and APDS punch deeper than SMLMs and thin out narrower swaths. TVLGs and Hammerheads are fired next because they explode laterally and set up undercutting chances for follow-up HEAP and laser shots.

Keep Fresh Armor Toward the Enemy: The most important defensive fact in ablative armor games is that, given enough time and ammo, even the weakest weapon can destroy any target. Since ammunition is unlimited for most *Centurion* weapons, targets must actively protect weakened armor by maneuvering it

away from enemy guns and maneuvering fresh armor to face fire. "Maneuver" means more than mere turning and moving—a rise to TTF will protect a weakened turret from being hit and expose thin, but fresh, bottom armor. A stop to ground in a crater makes any hit harder to achieve and shifts hits away from the hull and onto the turret. Of course, hull armor is protected by turning, too.

Never Save a Missile for the Endgame: Launch at maximum ROF at a painted target as soon as one is in range. More damage is done to the enemy if all missiles are launched prior to a vehicle's destruction than if a few are saved until the AFV dies. Max launch rates by multiple vehicles will also overload the enemy's Vulcan antimissile lasers and tempt him to fire at all incoming missiles with a reduced chance to shoot down any of yours. Use 'em or lose 'em.

With Big Gauss Cannons, Use HEAP or Light Armor, APDS on Heavy: A 200mm APDS round will scrape most of the armor from a 30 to 40 point facing and carve up the ballistic protection, but the damage won't touch other internal systems. A HEAP round will blow through the thin armor and ballistic protection to damage at least one system. When the target is covered with thicker hide, neither round will do more than damage ballistic protection. However, big APDS rounds will undercut some armor and thus set up laser shots at that slab of heavy armor.

If It Flies, It Dies: Kill every Interceptor you see as soon as you see it, even if you must forgo juicy shots at ground units that turn. Interceptors are attractive targets for several reasons: They are expensive and hideously underarmed and underarmored (a three-million-talent Interceptor is worth almost as many scenario points as a platoon of heavy grav tanks, and it packs a third as many weapons—some of which may well be useless in the atmosphere). They cannot take advantage of laser painting. And further, Interceptors are like bad pennies—they come back at inconvenient times. Kill 'em all and let Saints Orville and Wilbur sort them out.

FORCE SELECTION TIPS

It's impossible to comment on the best selections for every *Centurion* scenario. Since most *Centurion* games are meeting engagements played with armor from the "Vehicle Briefing," these tips are tailored to that kind of game.

The following optional rules are in effect: off-board artillery, Thor clusters, on-board artillery special rules from "The 11th ACR," grav flight modes, and Interceptor interface. The design of a sample 150-point TOG force will illustrate these tips.

Resist the Temptation to Build a Heavies-Only Force: Some *centurions* field forces made up of nothing but heavy tanks. The problems with this tactic are various:

A heavies-only force will be small. Just three heavy tanks will soak up more than one-third of the scenario point budget.

While two platoons of heavy tanks plus support can do tremendous damage with big gauss cannons, the force will have exploitable weaknesses. The heavies will have trouble using lasers and missiles without infantry to supply laser paints. The heavies will have low thrust, yielding maneuverability to a more balanced force. And dealing with the other side's infantry will require the heavy force to decline shots at armor, move to paint range, or both.

The most severe problem a heavies-only force faces is target profiling. The small number of targets in a heavies-only force allows the enemy to concentrate fire, while the large number of targets in a balanced force makes it easier to spread damage.

Invest a Third of the Budget in Infantry and APCs: This tip reflects both personal bias and game experience. No SF wargame has ever postulated ground warfare without infantry, since man-to-man combat is the essence of war in any era. Yes, armor in any form—grav tanks, BattleMechs, AT-ATs, whatever—is glamorous and fearsome to a man whose "armor" may be a fatigue jumpsuit, but it's the human soldier who wins wars.

Infantry is a decisive arm in *Centurion* because through laser painting infantry achieves equal importance with armor. The TOG Lupis APC (seven points with TVLG infantry) is a good choice for deploying forward TVLG squads. Six Lupis APCs with TVLG squads (two platoons) cost 42 points.

Buy a Pair of Heavies: Your centurion needs

the protection of heavy armor. Buy one for him to ride in and an identical vehicle as a decoy to prevent the enemy from concentrating fire on one vehicle in hopes of achieving a centurion kill. The cheapest TOG heavy, the Octavian, costs 21 points. A brace totals 42 points; the running force total is 84 points.

Fill Out Armored Infantry Centuries with Light Tanks: The two infantry platoons are best filled out to full century strength with light tanks. The Aeneas tank is a good buy for this mission at nine scenario points apiece; its 100mm Hammer Head rounds and a small 1.5/4 laser nicely complement the infantry TVLG and SMLM of the Lupis APCs. If the fight is to take place in open terrain, the Vespasian tank (at 10 points), with its 150mm gauss cannon, is a better choice. Total spent in this category is 27 points for three Aeneas tanks; the running force total is 111 points.

Deploy Artillery on the Game Board: Off-board artillery is terribly inefficient. It's foolish to spend 30 points on an asset that becomes useless when your centurion dies, when the same firepower can be had at a discount of nine points. On-board artillery has two other advantages over off-board artillery: an ROF of three if it does not move and direct-fire capability. A TOG Pompey from this category costs 21 points; the running total is now 132 points.

Blessed are the Thor Clusters, for They are the Harbingers of Victory: Javelins are good medicine for heavy armor; they will also tempt some foes to waste points on a

RENEGADE LEGION

fighter to counter them. Buy as many as you can afford. A single cluster costs 10 points, leaving eight points to spend.

Buy as Many Mortar Squads as Possible: Eight points buys four mortar squads and eight mortars. As stated above, light mortars are the most cost-effective infantry-killer in the game. Two mortars firing AP rounds make any open hex a kill zone for infantry. Put the squads on any vehicle as tankriders and drop them from TTF into a covered hex with good sight lines.

Buy No Interceptors: Some centurions liken Interceptor craft to A-10 tankbusters because the spacecraft have armor. As stated before, Interceptors are a waste of points. We spend no points here.

The final order of battle for this 150-point task force is: 6 Lupis light APCs with onboard TVLG infantry, 2 Octavian heavy tanks, 3 Aeneas light tanks, 1 Pompey artillery vehicle, 1 Thor cluster, 4 mortar squads mounted as tankriders. This is a force well rounded enough to stand up well in any fairly standard *Centurion* meeting engagement and strategically picked to work with the game system to your best advantage. Ω

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Lester W. Smith takes a look at the new *Chill*. Then Vaclav Ujcik reviews the computer game, *MegaTraveller 1: The Zhodani Conspiracy*, and Julia Martin discusses *The Con Game*.

Chill (1990 edition)

Mayfair Games Inc. \$27.

Design: David Ladyman, with Jeff R. Leason and Louis J. Prosperi

256-page hardbound book with 32-page insert

The new *Chill* is a hard-backed book, as opposed to the old boxed set. It is bound with the same quality as most of the recent American hardbacks, with a nonglossy cover like West End's *Star Wars* RPG. It looks like it ought to stand up to extensive use.

While the material in the original game totaled 116 pages, the new *Chill* totals 288, with a lot of new material. For example, the old game had 51 skills; the new one has 62, plus 16 Edges and 20 Drawbacks (advantages and disadvantages) that can be purchased to round a character out. The old game had 40 Evil Way Disciplines and nine Disciplines of the Art; the new has 64 and 12, respectively. The new game has 29 Animal listings and 58 Creatures, compared to the old game's 7 and 10.

Also new is a collection of 48 profession templates—descriptions of attributes, skills, and the like appropriate to a particular career type. One of the three ways of creating a character is to modify one of these templates to suit your desires. The other two ways are customizing one of the 10 predesigned characters, and designing your own from scratch. This last option is done with a point-based system, much different from the old game's reliance on random rolls.

Another portion of the expanded page count is a 16-page center portion of glossy full-color art. Ten pages of this section are devoted to maps of the continents, the other six to mood-setting artwork.

Speaking of artwork, the visual imagery of *Chill* has changed significantly. Gone are the clean, black-and-white line drawings and Victorian atmosphere of the original game. The art of the new *Chill* is more ragged, less sane. There are splotchy purple footprints ambling across some of the pages, and drips and splashes on others. Adding to this slightly schizoid atmosphere are occasional quotes from the evil "Rax," things like "I owe so many of my victimries to the fact that most mortals find saviouration in firemanship and marksmanism alone!" (one of his more lucid remarks). Some old players may find the atmosphere change to be disconcerting. Personally, though, I'm impressed.

More impressive, I think, is the polishing of the game mechanics. You'll find pretty much all of the old material here, though expanded. Skill checks are a much more straightforward proposition now, though, which means combat runs more simply as well. Gone is the old Action Table with its Defense Columns, Attack Margin ranks and multiple letter codes. Nowadays, you roll versus your skill, with modifiers such as those for an opponent's mastery level (if applicable) factored in beforehand. If you roll 10% of your skill or lower, it's a C (colossal) result. More than that, but less than half, is an H (high) success. More than half is an M (medium) result, unless it's within 10% of max, in which case it's an L (low) result. Rolling higher than your skill is a failure, of course. If you're rolling for combat, each weapon has a basic (L) damage rating, and better successes push that rating up a universal chart. The results are pretty much the same as in the original game, I suppose, but for some reason the new just seems more intuitively obvious.

Problems? None that I've found so far. If you liked the old *Chill*, I suspect you're going to like the new one even better. And to expand *Chill*'s scope, Mayfair has plans to release further sourcebooks for various horror subgenres.

The Zhodani Conspiracy

Paragon Software. \$54.95.

MegaTraveller computer game. Two 3.5 inch disks, one 144-page spiral-bound manual, and one technical supplement.

For the IBM (or compatible) with 512K. CGA, EGA (medium resolution, 16 color), VGA, and Tandy 1000 graphics. Joystick and mouse (not recommended, see below) optional; digitized sounds by Covox (no hardware required).

This review concerns the first version of the program. See the note at the end for information on the revision.

The manual is the first true spiral-bound booklet I've seen for a computer program, and I love it. It's much easier to use than the usual paperback-style manuals. Unfortunately, the contents are lacking—it includes a lot of information about *MegaTraveller* in general, but lacks the specifics necessary to help you play the computer version. I could only find descriptions of how to conduct combat and transfer objects in the technical supplement, so keep that document handy—you will be needing it!

The disks are not copy protected, but the game is, so keep your manual handy to deal with the protection measures.

You can use a pregenerated character or generate your own. Character generation begins along the classic, paper and pencil game lines. Once you accept a set of stats (rolled concurrently), you can try to enlist in one of five careers—army, navy, marines, scouts, and merchants (the last I would prefer to call a "career"). If you are using the mouse, carefully save each character—using the mouse often causes the computer to lock up, and the new characters will be lost!

I suggest generating enough characters to completely fill up that character file. This ensures that you have other characters that can join your party if (Norris forbid!) some of them die.

Problems with character generation include a few misspellings and an inability to print your characters' stats. Also, be wary of using game-generated characters in your standard *MegaTraveller* adventures. Several of the cascade skills have been modified (some in a minor fashion, some not), so the character generation process is not a direct conversion of *MegaTraveller* to the computer.

OUT OF THE FRYING PAN...

Now that you have recruited your party, it is time to rid the Spinward Marches of the evil Zhodani spy, Konrad Kiefer.

You start in a bar on Efate. You're just minding your own business when a woman crashes through the door and approaches (nearly runs into) you. She needs help catching a spy, and she gives you a ship and some instructions. How could you refuse a ship? Just as she finishes telling her story, in come the bad guys. Fortunately, Efate's Law Level is Low, so you have your weapons with you. There are only four of them and five of you, so you assume this should not be a problem. The game then takes you outside the bar, and the fun begins.

...AND INTO THE FIRE

Or does it? The designers made the combat system a "real-time" feature. This is in direct contrast to the *MegaTraveller* (and classic *Traveller*) rules, and makes the game extremely frustrating. After losing this initial fight three times, I reread the manual twice, then sought outside help (on GENIE).

As far as I'm concerned, the combat system is unplayable with a mouse and is barely tolerable using the keyboard (I have not tried a joystick). Three steps are required to enter combat and fire a shot, and two steps are needed for each shot after that. In addition, there's an extra step to change the character that can fire.

That brings up the second major flaw in the combat system—while the bad guys can

have several (I have had up to four) people firing at you, the player can get only one character to fire at a time. The documentation is misleading along this line, stating that you can easily control all characters separately. In essence, this is true; however, only one character can shoot at a time.

MAKING A LIVING

If you are careful, you can win combat with some practice and a fair amount of patience. Once past the opening fight, you will want to finish outfitting your characters and check out your new ship. You will have to assign each of your characters to a particular ship station. Make sure you do this carefully—your success may depend on having the character with the best skill doing a particular job. Depending on how much money you have, you may want to engage in some speculative trading. Be advised that there are no mail runs in this part of the Marches!

The game offers a variety of ways to get money, although you won't make millions without some work. You can explore 28 unique (but limited in scope) worlds, hunt down outlaws, search for heirlooms, carry jewelry to patrons, even race your ship to win valuable prizes. And you may meet up with Kiefer's goons, some Vargr, an Aslan, and several Hiver.

Starflight can become exciting or boring, depending on your point of view. Trying to find the proper quadrant location of the world you want to get to can be tedious, but trying to get the proper thrust setting as you circle a slightly gravitational world is fun. Jumpspace is mercifully short. (Nothing happens there anyway—right?)

MAN VS. MACHINE

I found *The Zhodani Conspiracy* simplistic, much like a first-time or second-time gaming session. Don't get me wrong—there's a lot in the computer version. But the computer lacks the human imagination that can really make a *Traveller* session sizzle.

But this is one of the most flexible computer games I've played. *Traveller* is a very flexible system, with a whole universe to discover. While the current computer game is limited to eight systems and 28 worlds, it presents a good foundation upon which to build. But without being able to use any real strategy in combat (the current strategy breaks down as: see man, shoot man, watch your other guys get shot), the game lacks excitement. I did not find any puzzles that were more than three steps long. They consisted of finding a patron who wants an item, finding the item, then getting the item to the patron. Many times, I found the item (by winning a firefight), then happened to come across the patron, who was astonished that I could have learned of and solved his plight so quickly!

A HELPING HAND

For the squeamish (and those who do not like hints), please skip this section. Those who need help (or just plain want it), read on.

Get your characters some combat armor or battle dress ASAP. The bad guys give no quarter. A PGMP-12 (or two) is also very handy, when it is allowed by the local Law Level.

Make sure that at least one character knows how to drive!

There is a severe water shortage on Louzy. Streechen wine can soothe a lot of tempers (and bring very high profits) on Boughene.

Pirating will give you a bad reputation throughout the Marches (but can be fun).

EVALUATION

I have always felt that all *Traveller* needed was to be combined with a computer to become the ultimate science-fiction game. *MegaTraveller 1: The Zhodani Conspiracy* is the first professional attempt at this, but it is hampered with several implementation problems and a lack of imagination. The game is not a "true" implementation of the *MegaTraveller* system, although it comes pretty close. The scenario's plot line is straightforward, and the game does not present anything technically advanced. While this computer version is fun, it is not the breakthrough for computer gaming that the printed version was for the science-fiction RPG genre.

EDITOR'S NOTE ON REVISED VERSION

A completely revised version (3.0) is now available. Using the mouse is now much easier and does not result in computer crashes. You can now print your characters' statistics, just as the manual states.

Combat has been greatly revised. Now you can pause the game during combat and issue separate orders to up to four other party members (such as "take cover" or "fire at that NPC"); after you remove the game from pause, they will perform these actions while you control one party member. In addition, targeting no longer requires that you maneuver a "box" to highlight a certain NPC as your target. Instead, the tab key is used to cycle through all available NPCs.

Finally, many other small bugs and items inconsistent to the "look" of a *MegaTraveller* product have been fixed or changed.

For information on the new version, write to Paragon in care of Medalist International, 180 Lakefront Drive, Hunt Valley, MD 21030.

The Con Game

Blacksburg Tactical Research Center.
\$10.00.

Design: Greg Porter
Boardgame. Includes six pages of rules, one game map, six record sheets, cards and counters.

Greg Porter has struck again. From the man who brought you that famous trilogy of parodic masterpieces, *Macho Women with Guns*, *Renegade Nuns on Wheels*, and *Bat-Winged Bimbos From Hell* comes *The Con Game*, a boardgame representing (or, more accurately, amusingly misrepresenting) the

gaming industry. In *The Con Game*, each player takes the part of a game company and attempts to put out new games, improve the status of already issued games on the market, make money, not go bankrupt, and stomp on the competition to get ahead.

The concept of a parody of the industry is not new (*File 13*—an old minigame published in *Dragon*, lo, these many years ago and now reprinted in the recently issued boxed collection of such games—featured a similar premise). But *The Con Game* carries the concept further and is, of course, enriched by Greg Porter's acerbic wit.

The Look: *The Con Game* is produced on a low budget. In the game's own terms, it is considerably above cheesy, but probably doesn't quite make average. However, all of the game components are sturdy enough to withstand play, feature some color, and are often exceptionally funny to use. For instance, reading the game cards is a blast. I still don't quite get the humor in the "Umpire Builder" card, though—"The railway game with creative shipping schedules, like Fruit and Cattle...tastes so good you forget the cattle!" (unless we're talking a reference to the Fruit and Fiber cereal commercial—hmm). Scanning the cover and back art and trying to figure out which elements of the pictures are trying to parody which games is worth 10 minutes of chuckles alone.

The Feel: The rules are clear, but not dry or excessively wordy. Their greatest virtue lies in the witty style in which they are written and the occasional amusing examples (which may or may not bear some faint resemblance to real occurrences) which illustrate important sections. Anyone who has been to a convention (and especially anyone who has worked in the gaming industry in any capacity) will find little snippets of the familiar and the humorous littering the rules. For example, at one point the author explains in the rules section which defines the action "Attempt to get distributors": "This is the only way to really make money. You've got to hound distributors with phone calls, free samples, catalogs, promotional gimmicks and other junk until they finally relent and carry your stuff just to get you off their backs."

The Game: *The Con Game* is definitely a "weasel" game—one which sets players up so that if they want to win, they have to con, trick, or undermine everyone else. On the other hand, the game has no pretensions to not being one (weasel games which pretend they aren't weasel games are the worst, in my opinion, as they "set you up" to take a fall if you are a new player). And many people have a great time playing such overtly adversarial games.

The game plays well and is fun—not really as much fun as reading the rules and cards, though (parody-based games seem to have that tendency). All told, though, I would recommend *The Con Game* because it is just so outrageous that I have to admire BTRC for publishing it. □

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HIWG (UK): The History of the Imperium Working Group is seeking UK **MegaTraveller** players interested in participating in the development of GDW's Shattered Imperium background (with special reference to events in the Vland Domain). For details, write to J.D. Law-Green, 1 Whitelands, Rawdon, Leeds, W. Yorks, LS19 6BU. (47)

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I CHALLENGE all **MegaTraveller** players to play against me by mail. Cost is just stamps—one on a SASE and one loose. For more information, write to John Moore, PO Box 2992, Glen Ellen, IL 60138. (46)

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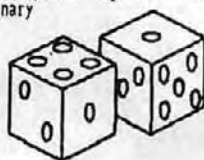
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*Congratulations to Petri Ukkonen of Finland who won a copy of **Red Empire** for sending in his feedback on issue 45.*

Next Issue

Start the new year off right! Don't miss **Challenge 48** in January 1991.

TWILIGHT: 2000

"The Barbados Campaign" by Loren Wiseman. And explore the world of the POW in "Strangers in a Strange Land."

MEGA TRAVELLER

Solve an Agatha Christie-style murder mystery in "Death Among the Stars." Plus "Blue Eyes" by Charles E. Gannon, the first in a three-part Hinterworlds adventure.

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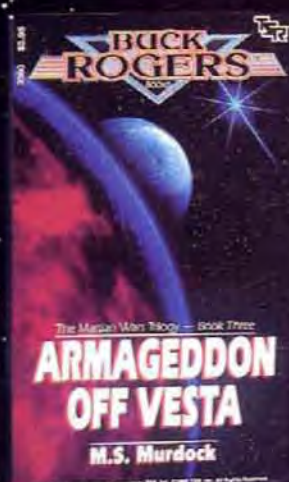
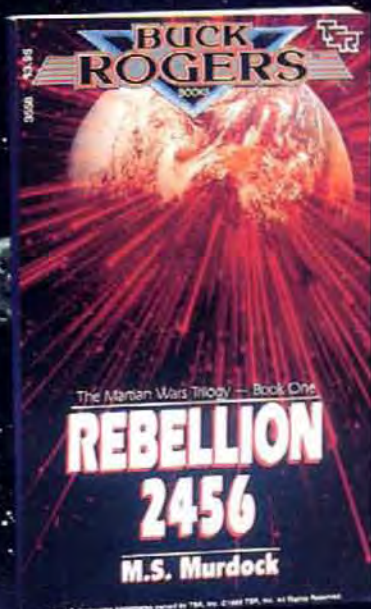
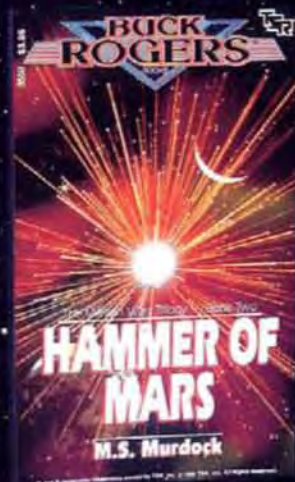
Feedback Results for Challenge 45

The Adventure Continues (Twilight: 2000)	3.80
BAGS (Twilight: 2000)	3.40
Toll Road (MegaTraveller)	3.80
Snowblind (MegaTraveller)	4.10
One Small Step (MegaTraveller)	4.20
Ship's Locker (MegaTraveller)	3.90
Catch & Carry Team (2300 AD)	3.30
Hot Stuff (2300 AD)	3.10
Mercury: The Nodding World (Space: 1889)	3.00
Donut Run (Shadowrun)	3.10
New on the Street (Shadowrun)	3.20
Star Fleet Tactics (Star Trek)	3.00
O.U.C.H. (Paranoia)	3.50
Beefing Up the PBI (Renegade Legion)	3.10
From the Management	3.90
Letters from our Readers	3.70
Conventions	3.30
Cartoon	3.50
Traveller News Service	4.30
Briefs	3.80
Showcase	3.10
Reviews	3.60
Classifieds	3.70
In My Opinion	3.40
This issue's cover art	4.60
This issue's interior art	3.80
This issue as a whole	3.90

We look forward to hearing your feedback on issue 47.

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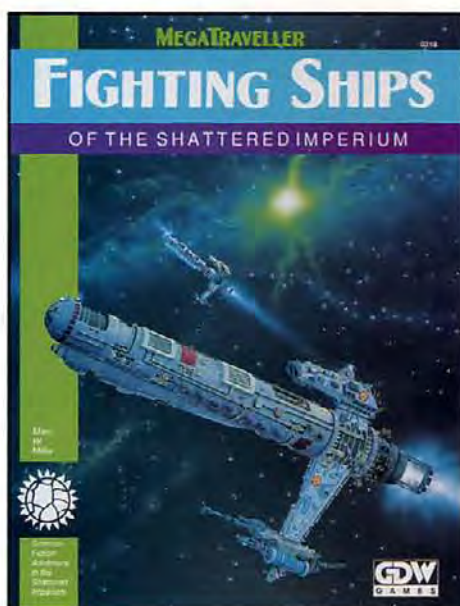
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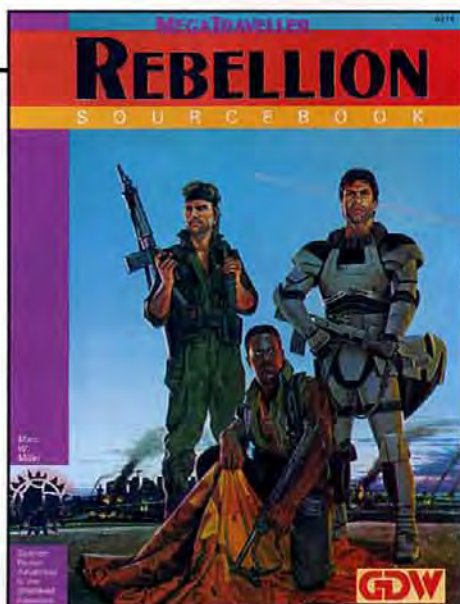
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